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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7753rd meeting
Tuesday, 2 August 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Ibrahim/Mrs. Adnin	(Malaysia)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Zagaynov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2016/360)

Letter dated 29 July 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2016/662)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President: As this is the first public meeting of the Security Council for the month of August, I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Ambassador Koro Bessho, Permanent Representative of Japan, for his service as President of the Council for the month of July. I am sure that I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Bessho and his delegation for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2016/360)

Letter dated 29 July 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2016/662)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam and Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Charles Whiteley, Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/360, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

I also wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/662, which contains a letter dated 29 July 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and I give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: The global security landscape continues to change dramatically, but one grim reality does not — children still pay the highest price in wartime. Young boys and girls are directly targeted and conscripted. They are tortured, maimed, imprisoned, starved, sexually abused and killed. Their homes and schools are destroyed. In places such as Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, children suffer through a living hell.

And in many cases, it is getting even worse. Thousands of Syrian children have been killed since the start of the conflict. Millions more are traumatized. Last year, Afghanistan recorded its highest rate of child casualties since 2009. In Somalia, recorded violations increased by 50 per cent from 2014 to 2015. In South Sudan, children continue to pay the heaviest price for

leaders' failure to commit to peace. In Yemen, six times as many children were killed and maimed in 2015 compared to just one year before, and five times as many were recruited into fighting. Violence continues to take a toll on Palestinian and Israeli children. My last report (S/2015/409) called on Israel to ensure accountability. That remains critical.

More than half of the world's refugees are frightened children. We must urgently address the root causes of displacement. At the same time, we have to confront this massive crisis. On 19 September, we will hold a United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants. I urge all Governments to bring ideas and commitments with a special focus on protecting children.

Violent extremism is forcing people from their homes and communities. Extremists are torturing, detaining and killing children, sending them on suicide missions and selling them as sex slaves. An effective response must place respect for human rights and humanitarian law at the centre. That includes protecting children during and after military operations, regardless of their affiliation. I am deeply concerned that more and more children are being arrested, detained or even killed in counter-terrorism operations.

I am also alarmed by violations of international humanitarian law caused by aerial bombardments. Even wars have rules. Hospitals and schools should be protected. Civilians should be spared. Children should not be used to fight. Peacekeeping also has rules. We must end the outrage of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers, staff and non-United Nations forces. I thank the Council for endorsing my decision to repatriate units when we have credible evidence against them, but we all must do more to secure accountability, enforce standards, provide training, assist victims and achieve justice.

Once again this year, objections to the annual report (S/2016/360) forced me to make a difficult decision. After very careful consideration, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition was removed from the annexes, pending the conclusions of a review. I have held talks with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the highest level possible, including meetings in New York with the Deputy Crown Prince, the Minister of Defence and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to express my serious concerns about the situation on the ground and the devastating impact on children. My senior advisers were also intensely engaged. I have since received information on measures taken by the coalition to prevent and end grave violations against children. I still have very strong concerns about the protection of Yemeni children. They must always come first. The forward-looking review continues, and the situation on the ground will be closely monitored. We will continue our engagement to ensure that concrete measures to protect children are implemented.

But I want to repeat that the content of the report stands. Let me be clear — the report and its annexes may cause discomfort, but that is not a goal in itself. Our aim is to protect children in danger by ensuring concrete change. Today I renew my appeal to every Member State and every party to conflict: If you want to protect your image, protect children.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. My Special Representative and her predecessors have made a meaningful difference for the youngest victims of war. Courageous and hard-working staff in the field have collected and verified information, sometimes at great personal risk. I fully support them. This work and my Special Representative deserve the full political backing of all Member States.

We need resources, but much more than that, we need political will. Commitment yields results. In 2015, more than 8,000 child soldiers were released. They are getting help to rebuild their lives. Many countries have also passed laws — with enforcement mechanisms — to add new safeguards for children against recruitment. The ultimate goal is to end these grave violations of the human rights of children. That demands ending conflicts and establishing peace. I call on the Council and all countries to do everything possible to back their words with actions that protect children from the scourge of armed conflict now and spare others in the future.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to Malaysia for organizing this open debate and to thanking all participants for attending.

The Secretary-General has just outlined how children remain the primary victims of armed conflict. This was Graça Machel's most troubling

conclusion in her report of 20 years ago (see A/51/306). Unfortunately, despite concerted efforts and significant progress, we have yet to change this fact. The report before the Council (S/2016/360) notes that a multitude of prolonged and increasingly complex conflicts are having a devastating impact on children. In a number of situations, a shocking disregard for international law is in evidence and impunity prevails.

(*spoke in English*)

In 2015, armed groups and Government forces killed, maimed, recruited and used, and inflicted sexual violence upon tens of thousands of boys and girls. There were over 2,000 attacks on schools and hospitals documented in 19 out of 20 situations in the report. Abduction remained a widespread concern, with over 4,000 incidents in 2015. Conflict also impacts children in ways that are not captured by the report's statistics. Children lose their parents, they are disabled due to easily curable illnesses and they suffer long-term psychological trauma.

As the Council is well aware, children have been significantly affected by violent extremism. Many groups operating today defy the norm that attacks must not be directed against civilians, and commit routine and brutal acts. To give an example, in April in Iraq the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant publicly executed a 15 year-old boy who they accused of being a disbeliever. The boy was tied between two cars that were driven in opposite directions. It was terrible. While the challenges faced by Member States to address these groups and protect civilians are evident, security responses that do not comply with international law inflict further harm; they even risk aiding the very groups Governments seek to combat.

The besiegement of civilians by Government forces is unconscionable. Airstrikes and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas by international coalitions or individual Member States are an acute concern. They have contributed to some of the highest numbers of documented child casualties. Extrajudicial killings and torture of civilians have also been reported in territory liberated from armed groups. Governments are increasingly using militias to fight in support of their forces. These groups frequently lack respect for or even understanding of international humanitarian law. The ongoing reports of the recruitment and use of children by this group of actors are another concern.

Counter-terrorism legislation is being broadly applied in many situations without appropriate checks and balances. Children are being apprehended on the basis of alleged links to non-State armed groups or of expansive interpretations of protecting national security. Civilian courts are being marginalized and juvenile justice is non-existent. Children can be held for months or even years by military or intelligence actors. If a child goes before a judge, it is often in a military or special court where due process and fair trial standards are sorely lacking.

Children have even been sentenced to death. Just two weeks ago in Somalia, I met boys condemned to death for their alleged association with Al-Shabaab. This cannot be an acceptable outcome for children when they are rescued from armed groups. Many have been abducted and forcibly recruited and are primarily victims. Detention is also employed in some situations as a tactic to recruit and use children for intelligence-gathering purposes. I cannot emphasize enough the danger they are put in when they are used in this way. Reports of children being executed by armed groups for suspicion of collaboration with Government forces are all too common.

The lack of respect for international humanitarian law is also having ramifications beyond conflict zones. As the Secretary-General noted, children are being displaced in ever-increasing numbers. Unfortunately, the response of some Member States has not always been in the best interests of children. We must do more, including by supporting the small number of conflict-affected Member States that host 90 per cent of the refugee population in providing basic services.

While the overall picture today is not positive, we cannot forget that progress has been achieved and continues in many places. I would like to seize the opportunity of briefing the Council in the twentieth year since the creation of the mandate to briefly reflect on some key accomplishments. Since the Secretary-General's first report to this body (S/2000/712), more than 115,000 children associated with parties to conflict have been released as a result of dialogue and action plans. To date, 25 action plans have been signed with parties to conflict; nine parties have fully complied and were delisted in Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Uganda.

The Children, Not Soldiers campaign has also helped to consolidate the emerging global consensus

that child soldiers should not be used in conflict. With the Government of the Sudan signing an action plan earlier this year, the United Nations is now engaged in implementing a written commitment with all Member States listed for recruitment and use of children. Since the launch of the campaign, there has been a significant reduction in verified cases of the recruitment and use of children by national security forces, especially in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar. I call on all concerned Governments and on all those who can provide support to do their utmost to fully implement these action plans.

Peace processes continue to represent a vital opportunity to engage with parties to conflict on child protection. Most recently, in Colombia, the Government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejercito del Pueblo concluded an historic agreement to separate and reintegrate all children associated with the armed group. The agreement's successful implementation will be an important signal to parties to other protracted conflicts that committed dialogue can lead to results.

The United Nations is also engaged in dialogue with listed armed groups in the Central African Republic, Mali, Myanmar, the Philippines, the Sudan and South Sudan. Years of work with Governments to improve legislative frameworks, build institutional capacity and address challenges, such as birth registrations, are bearing fruit. I am pleased to say that this engagement has helped thousands of children in the past 18 months, as mentioned by the Secretary-General in his statement. I urge national authorities to support ongoing and future discussions with armed groups on action plans so that many more can benefit.

The coordinated action generated by this mandate is at the heart of these achievements. The dedication and tireless efforts of Member States, United Nations colleagues, civil society and many more have and continue to bring about positive change for boys and girls living in communities ravaged by war. This shows that when parties to conflict faithfully engage and where there is political space to act on behalf of children, we are able to achieve results.

We are mandated to work and to achieve results with Governments and non-State armed groups, operating in the world's most difficult environments. As the Secretary-General noted, the goal of the report before the Council today is not to cause discomfort, but rather to bring about change for boys and girls confronted by violations the international community considers abhorrent. Our work often involves a difficult balancing act, but the tools developed by the Council to address grave violations against children are invaluable. The progress I have just outlined demonstrates that they are pragmatic, constructive and powerful enough to convince parties to conflict of the urgent need to protect children. Our success will depend on our impartiality, on the credibility of the tools at our disposal, and on the international community's support for our work. I want to reiterate my support for our dedicated colleagues on the ground who work tirelessly to achieve results.

Despite successes over the years, there is no denying that the overall picture of violations in situations of armed conflict is extremely worrisome. Concerned Governments bear the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians. The United Nations stands ready to support Governments in their efforts to protect children and help address violations outlined in the report, but we cannot make up for the lack of political will.

Others in this Chamber have a critical role to support these efforts. As members of the Security Council and the international community, they can and must do more to address the root causes of the suffering of children. Greater efforts must be made to prioritize conflict prevention and support peace processes, ensure respect for international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, and seek accountability when violations are committed. Impunity remains in times of war; this organ has a crucial role to play in ending it.

The number of crises we are faced with today will test our capacity in 2016 and for many years into the future. We face a considerable challenge and we need creative ways to support initiatives and programmes to protect children. I call on Member States to ensure adequate resources for education and health services in emergencies and to provide financial and technical support to effective reintegration programmes for former child soldiers. These initiatives are vital if we are to build long-term sustainable peace and security.

This mandate and the action it continues to generate represent a beacon of hope for millions of children affected by war. Our capacity to work together, to generate will to untangle the most difficult situations, will have a decisive impact on the present and future of millions of children.

The President: I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lake.

Mr. Lake: I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his strong words and his strong commitment to this issue, and my colleagues Leila Zerrougui for all her very determined work. All of us at UNICEF are truly grateful for the continuous efforts of the Security Council to protect the lives and futures of children who are threatened by armed conflict. We are also grateful to Malaysia for its leadership in the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Nearly 250 million — a number we often hear, but that is 250 million — children are living in countries and areas affected by war. Over 30 million have been displaced by conflict. Millions more have been physically and emotionally scarred by violence, witnessing the worst of humankind and seeing things in their young lives that no child should see. These numbers alone, and the many others outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360), paint a devastating picture.

But more, we can never forget that behind these statistics are millions of individual girls and boys. Child after child after child, millions of individual futures are at terrible risk — at risk of being killed in attacks on schools and hospitals; at risk of being maimed by a landmine or an airstrike; at risk of abduction, sexual violence and trafficking; and at risk of being recruited to fight, including, outrageously, as suicide bombers. They are victimized by warring adults who have lost any sense of simple morality and legal obligation. We are not human if we are not outraged by all of this. But our outrage and anger must be matched by action, not only, for example, to end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, but also to support them as they rebuild their lives and contribute to the future of their societies, and to seek measures that will prevent other children from suffering the same fate.

While the picture remains grim, we can be encouraged by our progress to date. Last year alone, thanks to the tireless efforts of so many of our partners dedicated to this cause, nearly 10,000 girls and boys were released from armed forces or armed groups, and nearly 7,000 accessed services, such as medical screening, psychosocial support and counselling, family tracing and reunification, and education and vocational training. This is all to get them back where they belong — with loved ones, in school, in a safe place where they can begin to heal and build the futures they deserve.

We also welcome the progress that individual countries are making on their action plans to prevent and end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, including through the Children, Not Soldiers campaign. Governments are enacting legislation and establishing procedures to keep children from being recruited. That includes age-assessment protocols to keep children from entering the military in Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan, and legislation enacted to criminalize child recruitment in countries where no such laws existed before.

In Colombia, children's rights are being woven into the peace agreement being negotiated in Havana, including a pilot initiative to release and provide assistance to children involved in the conflict. This is an important first step not only for these children, but for the many more who must follow — and indeed, a big step for Colombia's future. Another example was the signing just four months ago by the Government of the Sudan of an action plan to prevent the recruitment and use of children by its security forces.

But there is much more to be done beyond preventing and ending recruitment. The scale of all the violations against children — and indeed, the stakes of the violations for their societies — demand that all parties to conflict do far more to protect children's rights in conflict, whether they are tragically drawn into the fighting as combatants or have their health, education and very lives jeopardized by it. The United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict continues to help define the full scale of the crisis by providing vital information on the unspeakable atrocities they have experienced and witnessed. Using that information, we must and will continue working with parties to conflict to better prevent violations of the rights of children in armed conflicts and help shape programmes and services that can brighten these children's futures. That includes focused action in three particular key areas: explosive weapons and remnants of war, health care and education.

First, I note the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. These weapons accounted for almost 44,000 deaths and injuries last year alone. When they were used in densely populated areas, nine out of ten

victims were civilians. Not only does the use of these weapons kill and maim children; not only does it deny these children safe access to hospitals, schools and water facilities; but it also results in new and permanent disabilities among children and makes life even more difficult and dangerous for those already living with disabilities. Children are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in any conflict, and children living with disabilities are even more so.

We all should call on all parties to conflict to commit to protecting children by changing the way they wage their wars, including by ending the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. We should call on them to join the ban on landmines and cluster munitions. Children make up about half of those killed and injured by cluster munitions. We should call on them to share information and include provisions in ceasefire and peace agreements that will expedite the clearance of unexploded ordnance and provide targeted risk education to make communities safer. We should call on them to protect children with disabilities during military operations and in evacuation plans. And as always, we should continue calling on them to allow humanitarian aid to reach those most in need.

Secondly, I refer to health care. Beyond their illegality and immediate devastating impact, attacks against health workers and facilities have far-reaching consequences for children, their communities and health-care systems. All parties to conflict must protect and allow for the safe delivery of health care to these children and their families because every child has a right to health even in the midst of conflict — indeed, especially in the midst of conflict.

Thirdly, education is key. As with attacks against health facilities, the devastating impact of attacks on schools for children and the future of their societies cannot be overstated, which is why the Education Cannot Wait fund aims to reach those millions of young people whose education has been disrupted by crises, including by conflicts. Education improves their futures and is therefore vital to the futures of their communities and societies.

Our progress to date has shown that the children trapped by conflicts are not beyond our reach. With the support of Governments, the global community and all parties to conflict, we can and indeed must help these young lives to emerge from the shadows of war, not only through our resolutions, but also through our resolve; not only through our outrage, but also through our action.

The President: I thank Mr. Lake for his statement.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Malaysia.

I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his remarks and his steadfast commitment to the children and armed conflict agenda. I also wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to Special Representative Leila Zerrougui and Executive Director Anthony Lake of UNICEF for their insightful and compelling briefings. My delegation pays tribute to them both, as well as to the people and institutions they represent, for their tireless dedication to and relentless advocacy for the protection of rights of children affected by armed conflict.

Malaysia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Thailand on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

In making her call for action 20 years ago, Graça Machel appealed for daring solutions to address the impact of conflict on children. The international community rose to that challenge by embracing the children and armed conflict agenda both in the General Assembly and in the Security Council. Under this agenda, the landscape of international child protection has evolved over the past two decades through the development of a unique set of tools within the United Nations system to end grave violations against children, channel assistance and support to children affected by conflict, and hold parties to conflict accountable for their obligations under international law.

In that regard, the important role played by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, as a high-level advocate who gives children scarred by war a voice and a champion for their cause, must continue to be supported. Ms. Zarrougui and her predecessors have been successful in galvanizing international commitment to child protection, both through the close engagement of Member States and partners as well as through campaigns that raise broad awareness and support.

One heartening example is the progress achieved through the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, co-led by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF, to eliminate the recruitment and use of children in national security forces. Malaysia

commends the resolute commitment of Member States that have signed action plans to achieve that objective, and calls for continued international support for their efforts beyond 2016.

The deployment of child protection advisers in United Nations peace operations has also been instrumental to mainstreaming and implementing the child protection mandate in that field. Child protection advisers, together with other actors in the United Nations country task force, play an important advocacy role in dialogue with Governments and parties to conflict on child protection concerns, including developing action plans.

In that regard, we are closely following the consolidation of protection functions exercises in three United Nations peace operations: the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia. We call on the Secretary-General to continue ensuring that dedicated child protection capacities are maintained and strengthened, including if and when embedded in larger human rights units, and urge consultations to be held with Member States on this issue.

Malaysia also reaffirms its strong support for the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, established under resolution 1612 (2005), which enables the collection of verified information on grave violations against children that is crucial to ensuring that such heinous acts do not go unreported. We reiterate that accurate and objective facts, including information gathered through the monitoring and reporting mechanism, should be the determining factor that guides our actions in seeking the compliance of parties to conflict and holding perpetrators of grave violations accountable. The mandate and the tools it created remain urgently relevant today as children continue to suffer the horrifying consequences of war.

We echo Ms. Machel's call for daring solutions in the face of evolving trends and persisting challenges affecting children in situations of conflict. Non-State armed groups remain among the biggest perpetrators of grave violations against children, and ensuring their compliance with child protection's obligations under international humanitarian law is an ongoing challenge. We are deeply alarmed that non-State armed groups, including groups employing violent extremist tactics, remain the main perpetrators of the recruitment and use of children. One Boko Haram militiaman told a kidnapped girl who had been repeatedly raped by militias and subsequently trained to become a suicide bomber,

> "It would not be painful to be a suicide bomber. It would be just like if an ant bites you".

Even more heartbreaking, children who have been kidnapped by the non-State armed groups are stigmatized and shunned by their own families and communities upon their return or escape. They are treated with suspicion as possible suicide bombers or for having a baby fathered by a kidnapper. We urge Member States to treat children associated with such groups primarily as victims and to consider alternatives to prosecution and detention where appropriate, as well as to prioritize reintegration and rehabilitation programmes. The peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejercito del Pueblo provides a positive example in ensuring the protections and rights of children separated from armed groups.

Another challenge is addressing the needs created by the large scale of the displacement of children by armed conflicts. The image of Aylan Kurdi, the 3-year-old boy who drowned as his family attempted to escape the Syrian conflict in 2015, is emblematic of the fate of hundreds of children forced to flee armed conflict. Surviving a perilous journey, however, does not guarantee safety. Displaced children, particularly separated and unaccompanied children, are especially vulnerable to exploitation and grave violations by unscrupulous parties. It is therefore imperative that children in situations of displacement be given support to help them adapt to their new surroundings, including access to medical and psychosocial services, education and recreational activities.

Malaysia firmly believes that the agenda on children and armed conflict must continue to be strengthened and enhanced. In the two decades since the establishment of the agenda, the hopes and dreams of children in many parts of the world have continued to be dashed and their innocence robbed. The international community must redouble its efforts to secure peace and lift them from the depths of despair. While we have made progress in using the tools at our disposal, much more needs

to be done. Our work is far from over. I pledge my delegation's enduring commitment to that end.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to the other members of the Council.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank you so much, Mr. President, for presiding over this meeting and for all the work you and your team have done to shine a light on how children are faring around the world in your time on the Security Council.

I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for consistently giving the issue of children in armed conflict the attention it so clearly deserves. We are grateful to Special Representative Zerrougui and her team for their determined efforts to bring to light the plight of affected children. We also thank UNICEF Executive Director Lake for his lifelong dedication to supporting and protecting children. I also want to single out for thanks the diverse range of ambassadors and other diplomats who have turned out today. I think this turnout reflects how important the broader membership of the United Nations deems this issue.

Let me begin with what should be a non-controversial point, which is that two decades after Graça Machel's groundbreaking report (see A/51/306) highlighted the disproportionate and devastating impact of armed conflict on children, the Secretary-General's annual report continues to be a valuable tool for documenting abuses and for identifying those responsible.

The Security Council's mandate on children and armed conflict, which includes monitoring, reporting and listing of parties for violations, is crucial and must be maintained. The monitoring and reporting mechanism must play a central role in this process, including subjecting incoming reports to what needs to be a transparent, independent, impartial and thorough review. Yet to continue to be effective, adequate measures must be put in place to ensure sound methodology and to protect sources. The methodological approach needs to be continually strengthened to meet the highest standards, and victims. United Nations agencies and others must be able to provide information without fear of their identity being revealed or fear of reprisals.

Member States, all of us, have a responsibility to cooperate with the Secretary-General's reporting on this issue. We do not expect Governments to agree with everything in the Secretary-General's report. In fact, we encourage Member States to engage with the United Nations early and often and to challenge findings they deem inaccurate or unjustified, as well as to present evidence to support their views. That means Member States and the United Nations working together in good faith to share information and to address concerns, ascertain the facts and look for ways to improve. Even if we Governments do not ultimately agree with certain United Nations findings or conclusions, we must maintain support for the United Nations, such a vital organization that is aiming, as we have heard today, to help children everywhere.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360) provides a bleak yet unsurprising picture of the human rights violations committed against children in conflicts, many of which are actually worsening. The examples are myriad. In Yemen, the United Nations verified a five-fold increase in the number of children recruited during 2015, and a six-fold increase in the number of children killed and maimed during 2015, as compared to the previous year. In Afghanistan, 2015 saw the highest number of child casualties since the United Nations began systematically documenting them in 2009, with an average of more than 50 kids killed or injured every week.

In Syria, the Secretary-General's report highlighted the massive recruitment of children by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), including child foreign fighters as young as 7 years old. Seven — that is the age of my son, who is about to start the second grade. The report also documents the detention, and in some instances the torture, of children by the Al-Assad regime. For a sense of the horrors children are enduring in real time, just look at the Al-Assad regime's current siege of Aleppo. Of the 300,000 civilians trapped in the city, an estimated 100,000 are children, the overwhelming majority of whom do not have clean water to drink. When kids hear the sound of a helicopter or fighter jet overhead, one medical worker said, "They start screaming, hugging you and crying." It is not hard to understand why.

A non-governmental organization that runs an ambulance network said that approximately one third of the casualties in Aleppo are children. One relief worker described arriving at the scene of an air strike to help dig through rubble for survivors and seeing a small boy, who could not have been older than 10 years, walking towards him. The boy was holding his amputated left

arm in his right hand and shouting, "Sir, please put my arm back." Wounded children like that little boy arrive at the few hospitals that are still standing only to find there are no doctors or nurses to treat them because they are so overwhelmed by patients. Or they find medical professionals who cannot help them because they lack basic equipment or have run out of medicine due to the siege.

Often, as we all know, hospitals themselves are bombed. On 23 July, a paediatric hospital in Aleppo was hit by air strikes, not once but twice in a single night. The second blast shut down the oxygen supply to the room where newborns were being held, forcing the staff to evacuate the babies to a bomb shelter in the basement. An infant who had been alive for just two days reportedly died when he was taken from the room — a 2-day-old infant. This is the world that the children in Aleppo and so many other Syrian cities and towns are growing up in day after day. For children younger than 5 years old, it is all they have ever known.

So once again, we call on the Al-Assad regime to lift its deadly siege of all the other Syrian cities and towns where it is using these barbaric starve-or-surrender tactics — or perhaps more accurately: starve, get bombed or surrender. In Aleppo, the regime and allied militias must immediately allow all non-military traffic, including humanitarian and commercial suppliers, to move along Castello Road in order to address the tremendous needs exacerbated by the deadly siege. We also call on Russia to stop its air strikes on civilian targets, as well as to halt its support for the regime's encirclement of the city.

In addition to protecting children in conflict, we must address the mass displacement of children caused by conflict. As we all know, at the end of 2015 more than 65 million people were displaced worldwide, and more than half were children. Not only are more children displaced than at any time since the Second World War, but — and it is worth pausing on this — it is increasingly common for kids uprooted by war to spend their entire childhoods as refugees. Yet the world is not doing nearly enough to provide for child refugees — or for refugees in general, for that matter.

To help address this problem, President Obama is convening a refugee summit in September on the margins of the General Assembly to try to get Member States to take on more of their share. Together with Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, Jordan, Mexico and Sweden, we are asking Governments to make a deeper commitment to funding United Nations and humanitarian organizations and appeals and to welcome more refugees into their countries. And we are asking front-line countries, which are already doing way more than their fair share, to take additional steps to facilitate refugee education and employment. To that end, we hope that all members of the Council that have not yet made new commitments will send word back to their capitals about the need to step up. The lives of millions of children depend on it.

Let me conclude by saying that in June I travelled to Germany, where had the opportunity to meet with thousands of refugees. One was a 16-year-old Syrian girl named Nujeen Mustafa, who has cerebral palsy and relies on a wheelchair to get around. Nujeen and her family used to live in Kobani, which was taken over by ISIL in 2014. When ISIL arrived, Nujeen told me that one of two fates awaited her. Either she would be killed for being a Kurd or she would be thrown into a mental institution, because that is how ISIL treats people with disabilities. So, together with her older sister, Nujeen fled, first across northern Syria and Turkey and then Greece, Croatia and Slovenia. She travelled by train, taxi, inflatable dinghy and on her own two wheels before arriving in Germany, where she was reunited with her older brother.

When we met, Nujeen told me that if one thing made her sad, it was that people found her optimism so rare. When did being positive become so unusual, she asked. But Nujeen also recognize how exceedingly fortunate she was to have made it out of Syria and to have survived her journey in her wheelchair. People are dying every day for a normal daily routine, she told me, for the chance to get up and brush their teeth in the morning and go to school. It can be easy to forget that for millions of children living in conflicts around the world, that simple routine is a dream, a routine every kid deserves, something countless children would risk their lives for. No child should be put in that position. We must do everything we can to ensure that they do not end up in that position.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank Malaysia for having convened this debate on this crucial topic, as the protection of children in armed conflict represents a universal moral duty. I should also like to thank the Secretary-General for being with us today, for his statement and his commitment to this crucial issue.

As has been highlighted, important progress has been made since the call to action made by Ms. Graça Machel. This progress would not have been possible without the praiseworthy work undertaken for several years now by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, as well as the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake. On behalf of France, I should like warmly to thank Ms. Zerrougui and Mr. Lake and their teams for their exemplary action and the statements they made today. I should like also to thank civil-society actors, who play a vital role in supporting the work of the United Nations.

However, in spite of this progress, children continue to be recruited, torn from their families and denied education and health care. They are the victims of murder, mutilation, rape and other forms of sexual violence. As the black list shows, non-State armed groups are the perpetrators of most of these violations. Among them, the terrorist groups Da'esh and Boko Haram represent a particular threat, as they intensify the horror by making children not only the direct targets but also the perpetrators of terrorism, through suicide bombings, executions and trafficking in human beings. Above and beyond those children who are recruited and kidnapped, we must also think about the fate of children born to these armed groups, who risk perpetuating and making extremist violence seem normal, as if it were in their DNA.

The international community has a moral and political obligation to undertake this crucial existential combat for the sake of the children and of us all. The required mobilization includes not only military action but also tackling the root causes of this tragedy. That is the thrust of the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which France fully endorses. These root causes include education, which plays a key role. In Syria, almost 4 million children are deprived of access to education. France firmly condemns attacks against schools and calls upon States to uphold international law, in particular international humanitarian law, and to spare no effort to prevent a lost generation of children deprived of education, in particular young Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Combating terrorism is a sine qua non, but it cannot justify arbitrary detention. This is, however, the case in a number of theatres of conflict, where thousands of children are detained because of their affiliation with armed groups or in a totally arbitrary manner. This is the case in Syria, where many children, probably thousands, have been beaten and tortured in the prisons of the regime, often perishing there. That is not even to mention the mass bombings of civilians, including children, undertaken relentlessly by the Damascus regime in Aleppo and elsewhere.

We must never forget that Governments bear responsibility for protecting their people and must deal with children associated with armed groups in the most appropriate manner based on their age and life experience, pursuant to international standards of justice applicable to minors.

Given these weighty challenges, I would like to briefly highlight three areas of action.

First, at the institutional level, the United Nations has effective mechanisms to protect children in armed conflict. The Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, currently chaired by Malaysia, must continue to facilitate dialogue with Governments in New York and on the ground. The monitoring and reporting mechanism is also particularly useful, because it helps to identify all serious violations committed on the ground, so as to add them to the Secretary-General's annual black list. It is key for the United Nations and all States to ensure that these mechanisms are impartial so as to preserve their effectiveness.

We must also organize our actions at the operational level. The United Nations Must continue to deploy child protection advisers to identify and prevent rights violations and to ensure the protection of children is fully integrated into the planning of peacekeeping operations.

Finally, we need to ratchet up our action at a political level. In March 2016, the primary goal of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign launched by Ms. Zerrougui and UNICEF was achieved. Eight of the States concerned signed a national action plan to halt the recruitment of children in national security forces. Now the full implementation of those plans is required in order to reach a new goal, namely, a world free of child soldiers. That should be our shared goal. We can achieve it if we support and strengthen the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General by applying the Children, Not Soldiers campaign to non-State armed groups so as to secure additional concrete commitments on the ground.

Before concluding, I should like to pay tribute to the commitment and determination of the Secretary-General to combat sexual abuse within the United Nations and with respect to national forces under a United Nations mandate. France, as the Council is aware, remains fully mobilized in the areas of prevention, the training of staff and dealing with all allegations.

The protection of children in armed conflict requires exemplary behaviour from everyone and an unwavering commitment. France chose this path several years ago. Since the adoption of resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005), initiated by my country and which form the cornerstone of our shared efforts, France has continued to play a crucial role along these lines. It is in this spirit that in February 2017 in Paris, along with UNICEF, we will organize an international conference on the protection of children in armed conflict, to mark the 10-year anniversary of the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, which have been signed by 105 countries to date. I call on all States to participate in this event and endorse the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles at this time in order to demonstrate their commitment to the universal cause of protecting children in armed conflict.

Mr. Moustafa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency of the Council during the month of August. I wish you and your delegation every success.

I would also like to start by welcoming the efforts of the delegation of Malaysia to address the question of children in armed conflict in the Security Council, as well as the efforts deployed by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and Armed Conflict and by UNICEF. I also welcome the presence of the Secretary-General at our meeting today.

This month we are observing the twentieth anniversary of the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306), which initially prompted the Security Council to set up the institutional and legal framework to address the issue of children and armed conflict in the Council and to provide them with the necessary means of protection. The international community succeeded in implementing the recommendations of the report on child soldiers by entering into talks with the Governments and non-governmental actors with a view to releasing child soldiers and stressing the need to include in most peace conventions provisions for the reintegration of those children and for their necessary care and protection, as well as the urgency of the entry into force of the 2002 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Despite all these achievements, we have still not managed to fulfil most of the report's recommendations. The international community must review the recommendations, in particular those relating to displaced and refugee children. Given the shortage of financial resources available to carry out the recommendations relating to the host States in particular, much remains to be done with regard to sexual exploitation and gender violence cases, as well as the effects of sanctions regimes, health, nutrition, psychological rehabilitation and education.

The responsibility for protecting civilians, in particular children, rests first and foremost with States. At the same time, Egypt emphasizes its full commitment to the development of the children and armed conflict issue in the Security Council, including improving the institutional and legal framework aimed at providing the necessary protection for children living in hotbeds of tension and conflict.

During our presidency of the Council in May, in cooperation with the delegations of Japan, New Zealand, Uruguay and Spain, we managed to ensure the unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) on medical care in armed conflict with the sponsorship of a large number of non-Council members. As mentioned by Mr. Anthony Lake in his statement, that resolution relates directly to the protection of children in danger. Despite the effectiveness and efficiency of the mechanisms set up by the United Nations to monitor the violations against children in zones of conflict, children continue to be subjected to the most horrendous violations. In this connection, we wish to emphasize the following points.

First, the limitation of human and material resources represents a serious problem faced by States during and after conflicts. The Office of the Special Representative also suffers from a shortage of resources. My delegation would like to underscore that this hinders the reintegration of children released by armed groups. Secondly, limiting the mission of the established mechanisms to information-gathering on the violations committed in hotbeds of tension and

conflict, the numbers of victims and the perpetrators of those crimes and listing them in the annexes of the reports makes those reports a mere means of monitoring and fails to provide the necessary practical and realistic means of protection for children — a task with which they are mandated. Thirdly and lastly, it is important to verify the sources of information contained in the reports and not to restrict them to one party to the conflict alone. We must avoid double standards and contradictions between the body of the report and its annexes in some cases.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes Malaysia's initiative in convening today's meeting. We thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Ms. Zerrougui, and Executive Director of UNICEF Mr. Anthony Lake for their briefings.

Children are the primary victims of armed conflicts in war-torn countries and regions. As terrorist activities escalate and spread, terrorist organizations' killings, abductions and recruitment of children for terrorist attacks have become an increasingly serious problem. The continuing turbulence in parts of the Middle East has triggered large waves of refugees and migrants. Displacement and trafficking in children are becoming even more rampant. The international community should, in light of the new situation and dynamics, take effective measures for the protection of children in armed conflict.

First, we must wage a resolute fight against the heinous acts and violations carried out by terrorist organizations against children. The international community should maintain consistent standards, zero tolerance for and non-distinction vis-à-vis terrorism, bring great pressure to bear on terrorists, and firmly combat the killing, abuse and abduction of children carried out by terrorist organizations. All countries should step up their law enforcement cooperation to ensure that all those responsible for violations against children are severely punished in any country they may flee to. In rescuing children abducted by terrorist organizations, countries should increase their intelligence and information-sharing so as to fully mobilize all forces and come to the rescue of children held hostage.

Secondly, children should be prevented from becoming the victims of terrorist and extremist ideologies. The international community should take effective measures and effectively combat the use by terrorist organizations of the Internet to spread terror through audiovisual means and to carry out recruitment and incitement activities. We should improve the education of children and help them develop a mentality of respect, openness and tolerance, reject violence and avoid the negative influences of terrorist and extremist ideologies. We should give full play to the role of the family, the school and the community in forming a protective umbrella against the encroachment on children by terrorist ideologies.

Thirdly, a proper response should be made to trafficking in refugees and migrants. The countries of origin, transit and destination of refugees and migrants should improve their border enforcement cooperation, improve mechanisms for immigration, border control, customs and coast guards, combat related crimes, reduce the incidence of exploitation of children, step up the identification, repatriation and protection of children subject to trafficking, and protect children's legitimate rights and interests.

Fourthly, international humanitarian relief for displaced children needs to be strengthened. While respecting the sovereignty of a country in conflict and the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, the international community should ensure that children are provided with food, medical care, education and legal aid and help their reintegration into society. The role of the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund, inter alia, should be fully leveraged in coordinating international humanitarian relief efforts and forming synergies.

Mr. González de Linares Palou (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for having attended our open debate today and I thank him for his statement. I am also grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ms. Zerrougui, for presenting the annual report (S/2016/360). I thank the Executive Director of UNICEF for his briefing, which I found to be quite striking.

The delegation of Malaysia is doing an excellent job steering the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in a very discreet and effective manner. Malaysia is contributing to promoting the protection of children in armed conflict using all of the tools that

the Security Council has at its disposal. I commend Malaysia for that work.

Children and armed conflict is a topic that is so much more than an item on the agenda of the Security Council: it is a collective responsibility and an ethical imperative for all of us, as States Members of the United Nations and as human beings. Given the recruitment of minors and the bombing of schools and the kidnapping, rape and killing of children, we have to be intransigent when it comes to the protection of children and demand strict compliance with domestic and international law. That is why I would like to focus my comments on an essential question, namely, the credibility of those responsible for attacks against children in armed conflict. I am going to refer very briefly to three matters — the attacks against doctors and hospitals, the Children, Not Soldiers campaign and the fight against terrorism.

When the Charter of the United Nations was adopted, the nature of armed conflict was different than it is today. Wars and conflicts have evolved over the last 70 years. It has therefore been necessary for the Council to adopt new instruments to tackle the threats to peace and security. Resolution 1379 (2001) is an excellent example of this process of adaptation. At that time, the Secretariat was given the task of drawing up an annual list of parties responsible for deliberate attacks against children in a dispute. In a globalized world, with the possibilities of having access to means of communication and to social networks where information constantly flows in real time to any part of the world, this United Nations black list is called upon to mobilize trust and to have a record of violations of international humanitarian law and especially to ensure that we combine all of our efforts at every level to protect children in armed conflict.

This list could be a very useful instrument, but it will be useful only insofar as it is credible. As a result, we have to very strictly respect the process of compiling data on the part of the United Nations, which must continue to be completely transparent and neutral. When there are Member States that never appear on that list and where year after year we see their involvement in attacks on children, or when we decide to include or exclude a country for political reasons, we are irreparably eroding the credibility of the list and of the Organization. Therefore, we urge the Secretary-General and all Member States to respect the conclusions of the monitoring and reporting mechanism of the United Nations. I would like to make three comments.

First of all, Spain had the honour of belonging to the drafting team of resolution 2286 (2016) adopted in May of this year, concerning the attacks against doctors and hospitals referred to by my colleague from Egypt. We take note of the mentions made in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict. These are two parallel agendas, but they mutually reinforce each other. We are grateful for the letter that the Secretary-General just sent to the President of the Security Council announcing his intention to present a set of recommendations on the practical application of the resolution. We will naturally follow these recommendations very closely.

Secondly, we welcome, as the Secretary-General said, the success of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, which has made it possible to conclude national action plans for putting an end to the recruitment of children in the armed forces of States Members of the United Nations. Spain, which has contributed to financing this campaign, trusts that it will be a stimulus for addressing the challenge that remains, namely, non-State actors.

Thirdly and lastly, it is those non-State actors, in particular terrorists, who concern us the most. Episodes such as the beheading of an 11-year-old child, which took place in Aleppo, the abduction of girls by Boko Haram, the massive recruitment of minors by Da'esh, the suicide attacks carried out by minors — all of these acts show that children are increasingly exposed to violent extremism. We are not just talking about child soldiers, but also child terrorists, who are both executioners and victims. We have to use all of the tools that we have at our disposal to ensure that these attacks are investigated, that we identify and hold to account those who are responsible for them. That is the minimum that the victims deserve.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate and acknowledge your work as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I would also like to congratulate Malaysia and the Malaysian delegation in its capacity as president of the Council during the month of August. We wish you every success, Sir, and emphasize that you can count on our full support. We would also like to congratulate Japan and its entire delegation for their extraordinary

work in presiding over the Security Council in the month of July.

We welcome the presence and the statement of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and we thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her briefing. We offer her our support and praise for her efforts to promote and protect the rights of children affected by armed conflict. Of course, we also highlight the work done by the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake./

The concept note (S/2016/662, annex) prepared for this debate begins with an eloquent quotation from the 1996 Graça Machel report, which calls upon the conscience of each and every one of us in the light of the fact that,

> "[i]t is unconscionable that we so clearly and consistently see children's rights attacked and that we fail to defend them. It is unforgivable that children are assaulted, violated, murdered and yet our conscience is not revolted nor our sense of dignity challenged." (*A/51/306, para. 317*)

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela considers it tragic and ethically unacceptable that year after year ever more serious difficulties persist in protecting children affected by armed conflict and that in many of those cases the situation has worsened in the past two decades.

Approximately 60 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide, of which half are under 18 and all as a result of the tragedy of war, political and economic destabilization, poverty, violent extremism and terrorism. It is contradictory to aspire to lasting and sustainable peace when a significant number of children have grown up in an environment of armed violence and hatred, as well as the economic and social deprivation resulting from poverty and social exclusion. Without any doubt, those situations compromise the chances that such children can build up and in a few years take over the future of their countries based on a culture of peace and sustainable development.

Venezuela recognizes the political and legislative progress made in terms of the protection of children in armed conflicts, which is reflected in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Additional Protocol. However, despite those advances, humankind continues to face enormous challenges and contradictions regarding protection and respect for the rights of the most vulnerable.

In several conflicts throughout the world, especially in the Middle East, the Council has reacted inconsistently despite the suffering and the obvious and documented serious violations suffered by children. While in several cases we have adopted resolutions to facilitate humanitarian assistance and protection measures for civilians, including children, in other cases it has been impossible to make progress on the issue. Several countries in the region face a serious humanitarian crisis resulting from the wars in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, in which more than 80 per cent of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance. However, no progress has been made due to varying interests that deviate from the principles guiding the Organization. The report (S/2016/360) of the Secretary-General should not remain silent or dilute or put off addressing those issues because of political pressure of any kind.

The first great challenge we face is more than ever a moral and ethical imperative for the United Nations. It requires us to act consistently in our discussions on actions to protect children in armed conflict. The practice of using double standards in those areas only undermines the international efforts in favour of child protection and is an immoral contradiction and wholly unethical. Venezuela opposes and condemns all violations of international humanitarian or human rights committed against children in armed conflict by whomever, and calls upon all parties to a conflict to meet their obligations under international law. This Organization, in all instances, from the Secretariat to all of its Member States, must avoid impunity for those who commit grave violations against children in armed conflict. The United Nations must raise its voice for all children worldwide, particularly those who are victims of armed conflict, without distinction of any kind.

We note with concern and with shame how some countries are called to accountability for violations against children in armed conflict, and yet in response to calls for accountability for crimes and violations committed against Palestinian children by Israel a terrible silence remains. According to figures published by UNICEF, 22 children were killed by Israel in the first quarter of 2016. Moreover, more than 400 Palestinian children have been deprived of their freedom illegally, still unrecognized as minors and further subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Approximately

500 to 700 Palestinian children are tried before Israeli military courts each year.

We are alarmed by the double standard policy used in the case of Palestine, whereby the discussion changes in order to restrict the calls aimed at strengthening efforts to fulfil obligations under international humanitarian law, including the principle of proportionality. Accountability for violations committed against children in armed conflict must comply fully with the principles of objectivity, non-selectivity and impartiality. No one can be exempt, whether representing a non-State armed group, a State's military forces or whatever political interests.

The second of the great challenges that is before us is that of terrorism and violent extremism. In recent years, children have been significantly affected by those scourges and are often direct targets of acts designed to cause maximum civilian casualties and terrorize communities, even designating children as executioners or forcing them to become suicide bombers. The most outrageous case is that of the mass kidnappings and abuses committed against children by Boko Haram, Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front. The increase in violent extremism and terrorism in the Middle East, among other things, is a product of military interventions and assistance to armed extremists and terrorists in order to destabilize States, dismantle their institutional capacity and destroy the social fabric. That has led to adverse consequences for international peace and security, particularly security matters affecting children.

Violent non-State actors, including terrorist organizations, commit barbarous acts that threaten the human condition and facilitate abuse and violations of the rights of children, as happened recently in Syria, where Abdullah Issa, a Palestinian child 12 years of age, was beheaded in Aleppo by the forces of the misnamed "moderate" opposition, which uses the same tactics as the terrorists of the Al-Nusra Front, Da'esh and their associated entities.

Foreign military interventions and wars launched since 2001 in the Middle East, as in the case of Iraq, have been the main cause of children of no more than 10 years of age becoming the victims of trauma and abuse and direct victims of violence due to the destruction of societies in an environment that has been forcefully transformed in order to justify fear and death. Today many young people have been recruited by extremist organizations, such as Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front, to spread terror and instability throughout the world, thereby, and sadly, imposing a culture of death, with no expectation of a peaceful future for the children of the Middle East.

In that regard, we demand an end to all foreign military intervention in that region and the destabilization of entire societies by way of geopolitical and economic goals, and the transfer of weapons, funding, training and safe havens to terrorist and extremist groups. We urge all States to act in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the provisions of international instruments and the resolutions of both the Security Council and the General Assembly.

It is worrying that in many instances the answer to the threat posed by extreme violence gives rise to further human rights violations and increased suffering on the part of the civilian population, particularly children. It is alarming that the military operations conducted by the various coalitions, despite their names, have resulted in the same harm and pain against the civilian population — a situation that has fuelled the violent narrative of the groups they are combating. We call for any response to confront terrorism and violent extremism be consistent with international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law.

States must make use of measures and procedures consistent with the protections provided by international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child when dealing with children associated with armed or extremist groups. Prosecution and detention alternatives should be developed consonant with the interests of the child and prioritizing their effective reintegration.

We also believe that the most appropriate strategy to protect children from participation in and the consequences of war is to prevent and resolve conflict situations through a comprehensive approach to the structural causes. We recognize as a fact that in numerous cases the socioeconomic vulnerability, abuse, ethnic and religious intolerance, discrimination and exclusion that children face as a result of war facilitate their participation in hostilities and amplifies the adverse effects that armed conflict has on them. It is therefore crucial that we prevent the use and recruitment of children in armed conflict and ensure their protection and rights in such situations. In that way we can overcome the vicious cycle of violence and promote sustainable and inclusive social, political

and economic conditions. We must accordingly continue to support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, including capacity-building devoted in particular to the protection of children as laid out within the framework of the peacebuilding architecture. That is a crucial key for the effective and sustainable transition from war to peace. They must be in line with the special requirements needed to protect and assist children, including gender criteria as well the appropriate budgetary and timely international support.

Venezuela reiterates that the protection of children affected by armed conflict must be a fundamental priority for all States Members of the Organization, as well as for the entire United Nations system, in all stages of conflict. Under that premise, we are committed to continue providing our unwavering support to the efforts in line with international law and protect children as an inescapable ethical commitment.

I wish to conclude with an excerpt from a poem entitled "The Infinite Children", written by the Venezuelan poet Andrés Eloy Blanco:

> "When one has a child, every laugh sates us, every tear wrenches us, from wherever it comes. When one has a child, one has the world inside and the heart outside. And when one has a child, one has all the children of the world, the millions of children with whom all peoples cry, with whom mothers laugh and everyone dreams."

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Ukraine appreciates the Malaysian initiative to hold this open debate on children and armed conflict. It is timely and symbolic, considering that this year we are marking the twentieth anniversary of the creation of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, as well as all the briefers for their contributions. Ukraine commends the work of the Office of the Special Representative.

Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union later today.

The progress achieved over the past 20 years on the implementation of the mandate on children and armed conflict is quite impressive. We commend the fact that 25 action plans were signed between parties to conflict. Nine parties to conflict were delisted from the annexes of the annual reports. Yet Ukraine is deeply concerned over the increase in grave violations of children's rights, as outlined in the latest report (S/2016/360) of the Secretary-General. It is completely unacceptable that children continue to bear the brunt of suffering in war and armed conflict. The ongoing crises and violent conflicts in the Central African Republic, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in many other places have claimed the lives of thousands of children and disrupted the daily lives of millions of others. The most recent terrifying example of that is the Syrian city of Aleppo.

Armed conflicts result not only in senseless injuries and deaths but also severely disrupt children's lives. In zones of fighting children become separated from their parents and families in the chaos. Communities' lives are ruined. Schools are forced to close and health facilities cannot provide services, which are needed more than ever. Ongoing armed conflicts lead to an increase in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). That is a challenge with which we have to find a way to effectively deal. The plight of children displaced by armed conflict is especially of very serious concern. In situations of conflict, the risks for displaced children and child refugees to be recruited, abused or abducted are chillingly real. We all have to ask ourselves: Have we as members of the international community done enough to ensure the protection of those children?

The report highlights the concerns with regard to Member States' responses to violent extremism. Ukraine fully shares the Secretary-General's opinion that we need to identify and address the root causes of violent extremism. In our view, education is a key factor in countering extremist narratives. However, every child's right to a quality education is out of reach for millions of children affected by conflict. Yet education alone is not enough. To address the vicious cycle of conflict, violence and hatred, more must be done to put an end to impunity for the grave crimes that take place in various regions. According to UNICEF, nearly 1 in 4 of approximately 110 million children of primary and lower-secondary school age — typically between 6- and 15-years-old — living in conflict areas is missing out on their education. An average of four schools or hospitals is attacked or occupied by armed forces and groups every day. More has to be done to better protect schools from attack and deter the military use of them in accordance with international law.

Unfortunately, we know first-hand what negative impact armed conflicts can have on children. According

to our data, 68 children have been killed and 186 have been wounded in the eastern part of Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict masterminded by Russia. The number of internally displaced persons IDPs in Ukraine who were forced to leave their homes in war affected regions now stands at 1.7 million, including 215,000 children. The Ukrainian Government is doing its utmost to strengthen social protection for displaced children and families with children, including through the elaboration of relevant legislation. As UNICEF reports, the lives of 580,000 children living in non-government-controlled areas and along the contact line in eastern Ukraine have been severely effected as a result of the continuing conflict. According to the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 39 schools, kindergartens and other facilities for children in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine are used for military purposes by the Russian-backed illegal armed groups. They have transformed those sites into barracks, fortified military outposts and ammunition and weapons storage facilities.

On numerous occasions Russian-backed separatists have used school grounds as artillery and mortar positions. There are also extremely worrying reports on the establishment of camps in which children are trained to handle weapons and on the use of children for intelligence gathering and manning checkpoints. For example, in May 2015, at a checkpoint on the outskirts of Makiivka under the control of the so called Donetsk People's Republic, 10 kilometres to the east of Donetsk, monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observed a child, approximately 12 to 14 years of age, wearing a camouflage uniform and holding an AK-47 rifle. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine has on several occasions reported that irregular armed formations in the east are allegedly preventing young men from leaving Donetsk and forcefully recruiting them to join their ranks, which could amount to human trafficking. In particular, at checkpoints controlled by the Donetsk People's Republic, the OSCE Mission observed young armed persons, with some of the male individuals estimated to be minors. There have also been reports from various sources that children as young as 15 years of age were being recruited to armed youth groups and taking part in active combat as full-fledged members of the combined Russian-backed militant forces, including as youth reconnaissance and sabotage groups operating within Government-controlled territory.

It all amounts to child recruitment, which is a grave violation of international humanitarian law. In that light, the fact that the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict does not include any reference to the situation of Ukrainian children affected by the conflict in the Donbas region of Ukraine is an omission that should be corrected. Unfortunately, this is another example of turning a blind eye to the sole ongoing armed conflict in Europe.

Ukraine highly appreciates the financial and technical assistance provided to our country by the United Nations Children's Fund. We are especially grateful to UNICEF and its partners for their continuous support of children, in particular those affected by the consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Ukraine's commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. We will continue to do our utmost to that end in the framework of the United Nations system, regional organizations and civil society.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the delegation of Malaysia for its initiative to organize today's meeting, a well as for its able and dynamic leadership of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We are grateful to the Secretary-General and to today's briefers for their substantive contributions to today's meeting.

We carefully studied the report (S/2016/360) of the Secretary-General on the issue of children and armed conflict. We would like to note the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, including in the now-concluding Children, Not Soldiers campaign.

We share the concern of the authors of the report about the consequences for children as a result of the numerous conflicts around the world. Modern-day savagery is what we would call instances where children become targets of deliberate attacks. We are seriously concerned about the destruction of schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. The situation is dire in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa. In recent days, as a result of the United States-led air strikes, dozens of civilians have been killed in Syria, including women and children. The erosion of State institutions as a result of external intervention in the region has created a breeding ground for terrorism

and violent extremism. It is no surprise that children are used as terrorists, suicide bombers or martyrs to be beheaded. Such grisly crimes point to the urgent need for coordinated and sustained efforts by the international community to combat terrorism.

Unfortunately, some international actors and groups perpetrating such atrocities are referrred to as "moderates". That brings to mind the recent attack against the Palestinian child beheaded by armed elements of the Noureddin Al-Zanki group. We are convinced that allowing such "opposition" is unconscionable. It is high time that the Security Council expand the list of terrorist groups operating in Syria.

We support the appeal of the Secretary-General to scale up programmes to prevent the recruitment of children via social networks and to combat the spread of violent extremism through social media.

The report notes an increase in the number of children displaced as a result of numerous conflicts. We agree with the conclusion that lasting peace is the best way to reduce the flow of displaced persons, including children.

We note the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the use of country visits aimed at ensuring that parties to a conflict, including non-State armed groups, take the necessary measures to protect children.

Given that these issues are the responsibility of national Governments, it is particularly important to establish cooperation with Governments. We think that measuring progress in the protection of children must be based primarily on an objective asssessment of the situation on the ground, rather than being guided by statistics included in action plans. An impartial approach and using only verified information are of crucial importance, including in the drafting of reports on this issue. There is a need to draw upon data from reliable sources, following thorough checking. There should be no attempts to bring outside political pressure to bear with respect to the activities of the Special Representative as she carries out her mandate.

In order to ensure effective United Nations action to protect children in situations of armed conflict, adequate capacity should be provided in peacekeeping operations. Missions should be equipped with devoted, highly qualified professionals who stay far removed from politics. We have questions with regard to the idea of so-called consolidation of specialized protection functions under the human rights component. Such an initiative could have a negative impact on the effectiveness of United Nations missions in protecting children, shifting the emphasis to human rights issues. We believe that this type of decision should not be taken without prior consultation with States, especially as the work on the subject of children and armed conflict is carried out on the basis of Security Council mandates.

However much the Ukrainian delegation would like to place the blame on the Russian Federation for the situation in Donbas, including that of children, the situation is in fact the result of a military operation by Kyiv against the east of Ukraine. Unfortunately, in spite of statements of commitment to the Minsk package, Ukrainian military activities continue. According to the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, between 12 and 20 July alone, rebel-controlled residential areas were shelled from positions held by the Ukrainian armed forces. Houses, schools and electrical facilities and gas plants came under fire. Civilians were wounded and killed.

The Mission's report indicates that approximately 70 per cent of all shelling targeted residential areas of Dombas and was carried out by the Ukrainian military. Military activity by the Ukrainian armed forces is continuing along with stubborn determination not to implement the Minsk agreements and the obligations entered into by Kyiv. There is a focus on ensuring lasting security, but Kyiv is actually provoking clashes along the line of contact.

The economic blockade of Donbas is on Kyiv's conscience, as is hurting children, including hampering basic services and goods such as medication, education, health care and so on. Numerous accounts from non-governmental organizations point to the use of schools and other educational institutions by Ukrainian military forces, including the destruction and seizure of property.

We have noted many times that there is no military solution to the crisis in Ukraine. We must prevent the increasing tensions in the east from leading to full military action. We once again appeal to the Ukrainian representatives not to escalate tensions and instead to concentrate on full and strict compliance with the package of measures through direct dialogue between Kyiv and Donbas.

The Graça Machel report on children and armed conflict (see A/51/306) was published 20 years ago. The report focused on the disproportionate effect of war on children. Over the years, the Security Council has developed a toolkit to systematically address this challenge. In today's complex environment, it is important that all links in the chain hold up, that they be impartial and that they be guided by the need to cooperate.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We congratulate Malaysia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August. We express our gratitude for the convening of this open debate and commend the Malaysian delegation for its excellent work and dedication in chairing the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We assure you, Mr. President, of Angola's full cooperation towards the success of the Security Council's proceedings during your presidency.

We thank the Secretary-General for his insightful remarks. A special word of praise goes to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, as we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of her Office. We pledge to Ms. Zerrougui our full political backing for the outstanding mission entrusted to her Office.

We also thank the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, for his remarks and for the work of UNICEF to better the fate of children all over the world.

Current conflicts disproportionately impact children. Civilians are the main victims of indiscriminate attacks, with disturbing repercussions on children. The report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2016/360) highlights serious challenges to the protection of children and the increasing violations inflicted upon them. The situations in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Palestine are some of the instances reported by the United Nations of children being brutally killed, injured, maimed, abducted, forcibly recruited into armed groups and exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation.

The gruesome reality shows an increasing number of children affected by violent extremism. They are used as executioners or suicide bombers; targeted by acts intended to destroy, humiliate and terrorize communities in order to force them into compliance; and subject to massive displacement and all sorts of trafficking, including the slave trade. The Secretary-General's report highlights cases of the deprivation of the liberty of children formerly associated with extremists or armed groups, without due process. In our view, these cases should be carefully reviewed, since many of those children are victims and should be treated as such. Member States must ensure that trial procedures are consistent with international standards of juvenile justice and the principles of the best interests of the child and their specific needs and vulnerabilities. The reintegration, not punishment, of children formerly associated with armed groups should be the priority.

One very disturbing trend is that of increasing attacks on densely populated areas — including schools, hospitals and medical facilities — by military forces and armed and terrorist groups. These criminal actions must end and, in due time, the perpetrators must be held accountable. The recently adopted resolution 2286 (2016) recalls the specific obligation under international humanitarian law to respect and protect medical and humanitarian personnel, their means of transport and equipment, and hospitals and other medical facilities in situations of armed conflict, and to ensure that the wounded and sick receive the medical care and assistance required.

Member States and the international community must do all in their power to help protect schools, students and teachers in situations of armed conflict and ensure that schools remain a safe place, while strictly respecting their civil character. Angola recently adhered to the Safe Schools Declaration, adopted at the Oslo conference in May 2015, endorsing the guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use duringt conflict. This process has been driven by Member States, civil society and child protection actors.

Another area of concern is the continued allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers and non-United Nations international forces. In that regard, we are of the view that peacekeeping operations should establish a mandatory predeployment requirement for all troop-contributing countries in training on child protection, aimed at radically changing the current state of affairs. The systematic inclusion of child protection advisers in the mandates of special political and peacekeeping missions is important in making troop-contributing

countries and individual members of peacekeeping missions further aware of this critical issue.

On a positive note, we would like to underline the progress made by the Children, Not Soldiers campaign. The commitments of Governments involved in the campaign bring them into compliance with international standards bearing on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. Governments listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's reports are now implementing action plans with the United Nations aimed at eliminating the recruitment and use of children in national security forces. Most parties listed in the reports are non-State armed groups. We call on the United Nations to continue striving to identify concrete commitments by engaging with armed groups in order to attain new action plans while implementing existing ones with a view to ending the recruitment and use of children as soldiers.

The engagement with non-State armed groups has had remarkable results, in particular in the Central African Republic. The signing of an agreement to end the recruitment and use of and other violations against children led to the release, during the Bangui Forum in 2015, of over 3,000 children from the ranks of signatory armed groups. Similar events in Colombia, Mali, Myanmar, Philippines, the Sudan and South Sudan are other examples of progress in that sense. The inclusion in peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes of specific commitments related to child protection, and the provision of requirements for the rapid release of children from armed forces and non-State armed groups are, in our view, important measures in post-conflicts situations.

In conclusion, ongoing armed conflicts have resulted in the forced displacement of ever-growing numbers of people. In 2015, children — many of them unaccompanied or separated from their families and in high-risk situations — constituted half of the refugee population. Preventing the outbreak of conflicts is still the best way to protect children. Unfortunately, the international community still lacks appropriate tools for effective preventive action. Meanwhile, the protection of children in armed conflict must continue to be at the centre of the international community's priorities and of a true, comprehensive strategy of active protection and humanitarian response.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): We congratulate Malaysia on convening this debate and on its leadership of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We thank the Secretary-General for his careful briefing, and Ms. Zerrougui and Mr. Lake both for their briefings and for their important work in protecting the interests of children.

As others have noted, it has been 20 years since the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306) was released, drawing global attention to the devastating impact of armed conflict on children. Since then, we have established a strong framework to monitor and address violations against children in armed conflict. Its purpose is not simply to criticize or censure, but also to drive practical improvements on the ground. The Secretary-General, Ms. Zerrougui and Mr. Lake, as well as other speakers, have described the places and ways in which children are suffering in conflict zones. We are all horrified at the way children are used, abused, manipulated and killed; their lives blighted, their futures destroyed. Yet far too often, we see utter indifference to this suffering of the innocent on the part of those who could make a difference yet chose not to.

There are real limits to what we as a Council and as a United Nations can do to change things. But we must make full use of the tools available to us. The Secretary-General has been given a clear mandate to report on and list those parties responsible for grave violations committed against children in armed conflict.

It is, of course, possible that information used in such reports is contested, and it is important that there are discussions to ensure that reports are as accurate as possible. Nevertheless, the Secretary-General and his office must be able to discharge their mandate independently in order to maintain a transparent and credible listing process. All Member States must respect the Secretary-General's independence, as required by the Charter. This is a collective responsibility that we all must uphold. So too must the United Nations and we Member States live up to our commitments to protect children and others from sexual abuse and exploitation by United Nations peacekeepers and personnel. Complaints must be investigated and perpetrators must be brought to justice.

As Ms. Zerrougui has reminded us, action plans with listed parties are delivering clear, practical results. Since 2003, nine parties to conflicts in Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Uganda have completed their action plans and have been delisted from the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report.

This progress is welcome. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the situation of children in many conflict settings remains grave.

The Secretary-General's latest report (S/2016/360) paints a harrowing picture. I wish to highlight several issues that demand urgent attention. Both schools and hospitals have special protections under international humanitarian law. Yet attacks on schools and hospitals were documented in 19 out of 20 situations of conflict in 2015. Parties to conflict continue to use schools and universities for military purposes, leaving children vulnerable to retaliatory attack. Even where no military attack occurs, the presence of armed forces within schools exposes children to increased risk of sexual violence and of recruitment by armed actors. New Zealand has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, as have 52 other Member States. We urge others to do the same.

In May, at the initiative of New Zealand and four other elected members, the Council adopted a resolution on health care in armed conflict, which unequivocally condemned attacks on health-care workers and health-care facilities. Our message was clear: the wounded and sick, medical personnel, facilities, transport and equipment must be respected and protected. The delivery of medical assistance must not be obstructed. It is that simple.

And yet attacks on hospitals have continued, with children frequently among the casualties. The recent fighting in Aleppo has seen further egregious examples. These attacks are an affront to our common humanity and must stop. We urge all States and parties to conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and to redouble their efforts to protect civilians and limit the harm to which they are exposed.

Where fear of violent extremism builds, we see increasing numbers of children detained without charge by Governments that consider them security threats. These children are frequently subject to torture and ill-treatment. As the Secretary-General has underlined, depriving children of their liberty is contrary to the best interests of both the child and of society as a whole. The abuse of children in detention only creates a greater sense of grievance in communities and further fuels the spread of violent extremism. The detention of children without charge must stop. Children associated with armed groups should be transferred to child protection authorities for rehabilitation. If charged with a valid criminal offence, children must be treated in accordance with international juvenile justice standards. We urge Member States to treat children associated with armed groups as victims entitled to full protection of their human rights.

In that regard, we fully support the Secretary General's message around reintegration and rehabilitation. No child's story ends simply with his or her release by an armed group. Adequately funded reintegration programmes for children separated from armed forces and groups are needed to enable children to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. Without support, children may return to violence.

Former child soldiers who have acquired a disability during conflict have particular rehabilitation and reintegration needs. Such children are especially likely to experience isolation and neglect. We would welcome discussion among the Secretary-General's Special Representative, UNICEF, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other relevant stakeholders to develop recommendations or guidance for the reintegration and rehabilitation of these children.

In closing, let me reiterate New Zealand's full support for the work of the Special Representative and her office, the rigour and integrity of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, and the Secretary General's comprehensive reporting and recommendations. We urge all Member States to continue to support their vital work and to help them translate the global consensus on the need to protect the rights of children in conflict settings into a much better reality than we see today.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, at the outset may I congratulate you on Malaysia's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council in this month of August and assure you of the full support of the Senegalese delegation. I would also like to thank Malaysia's predecessor in the post, Japan, for its outstanding presidency in July.

Ambassador Ibrahim, it is true that sometimes one topic is hidden within another. By devoting an open debate to the crucial problem of children in armed conflicts at the beginning of your presidency, you are demonstrating the remarkable leadership you have shown and will continue to show at the head of the Security Council Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict. You have highlighted our humanity, as Anthony Lake reminded us, as well as the humanity

of the Security Council by consistently promoting the action of the Council for the protection of children in armed conflict.

Stéphane Hessel, a brilliant French intellectual has said: "Be outraged". Here, in the Council, were are outraged, but more than that, we are mobilized, and we have chosen to act to improve the situation of children affected by armed conflict. By inviting us this morning to reflect upon children in armed conflicts, you clearly intended, Mr. President, to call attention to the three-fold tragedy of these children: as civilian victims of the worst atrocities in theatres of operation; as victims of forced recruitment by parties to the conflict, particularly non-State armed groups; and as victims of extreme physical and psychological trauma.

That is the reason the Senegalese delegation welcomes the holding of this debate. We extend heartfelt thanks to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, to his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Leila Zerrougui, and to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, for their brilliant statements, which further elucidate the gravity and scope of the phenomenon we are up against.

In looking at the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360) we see that children, in addition to forced recruitment, killings, maiming, abduction, displacement and sexual violence, are also victims of violent extremism and of terrorists who cynically exploit them as sexual slaves and, even worse, as human bombs. They do so in flagrant violation of international law, notably the four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols and of resolution 1261 (1999) — the first of its type adopted by the Council on the topic. That is why the Senegalese delegation endorses the words of the Secretary-General as he affirms in his report:

> "The impact on children of our collective failure to prevent and end conflict is severe ... . Those violations are directly related to the denigration of the respect for international humanitarian and human rights law by parties to the conflict." (*S/2016/360, para. 4*)

The current debate is therefore a way to challenge the universal conscience regarding the disgrace represented by the fate of children in conflicts. It is Senegal's belief that the situation has gone on far too long. Senegal urgently calls for three-fold action: first, guaranteeing the protection of children, then strengthening preventive measures and, finally, ensuring accountability for perpetrators of war crimes.

The Children, Not Soldiers campaign has had a significant impact in the protection of child victims of armed conflict, including through the signing of 25 action plans that contributed to the efforts that made possible the freeing of more than 115,000 children since 2000, including 8,000 in 2015 alone, if my figures are correct. The campaign has also facilitated the taking into account of the situation of children in the drafting and signing of ceasefire and peace agreements around the globe. This trend should be continued and strengthened. Likewise, the integration of this matter into the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations should be systematic, from the peacekeeping phase to that of peacebuilding. And it should include the deployment of child protection advisers.

Given the numerous challenges to the provision of humanitarian assistance, my delegation believes that humanitarian pauses are obligatory for the parties in conflict. We take this opportunity to strongly condemn the militarization of schools and hospitals. Firing on ambulances and schools must cease.

This brings me to the second part of my statement, namely, the prevention of conflicts, which should be at the core of our concerns. This moves from promoting ongoing and inclusive political dialogue to rapid alert, via good offices, all in the framework of a regional and subregional approach supported by the international community. Prevention should also involve tracking and controling the flow of weapons, including small arms and light weapons, so as to address their proliferation, in accordance with the Arms Trade Treaty. Equally important are the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for child soldiers to prevent their taking up arms again.

Speaking of the social reintegration of children through psychological support, educational programmes and professional training, I would like to note here the creation in the member States of the Economic Community of West African States, including Senegal, of welcome and family placement centres for child soldiers, as well as jurisdictions and specialized centres for the detention of minors.

These different measures were introduced to mitigate the disastrous impact of the conscription of children on society, conscription that undermines the social contract that links the security forces to the

civilian populations that they are supposed to protect. It is imperative to ensure accountability for the perpetrators of such atrocities. The success of the difficult process of reconciliation depends on that. The determination of warlords to continue to carry out abominable crimes should be countered by our unshakable will and our collective responsibility to halt impunity and to ensure that justice is served. We owe this to the victims; we owe this to current and future generations.

In conclusion, I wish to highlight the importance of establishing a holistic strategy that takes into account all of the elements I have mentioned. I would like to reaffirm Senegal's determination to continue to contribute to the work of eliminating this scourge. That is how we will see the peaceful and inclusive societies advocated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1).

Mr. Bessho (Japan): Let me express my congratulations to you, Sir, on assuming the post of President for August. I look forward to working with Malaysia in the Security Council presidency. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your initiative in convening today's open debate. Let me also thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as well as the briefers for their respective briefings.

Japan associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. We are proud to be a member of that Group.

Twenty years have passed since the General Assembly adopted the mandate for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. I welcome the progress that has been made in the years since. Very recently, as of March, all the countries engaged in the Children, Not Soldiers campaign had signed their respective action plans. I welcome this achievement and would like to commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her tireless work in promoting the campaign. I should like to point out, however, that signing an action plan is just a starting point, not the goal. As the report (S/2016/360) of the Secretary-General issued in April emphasizes, it is difficult for child soldiers released from militaries or armed groups to reintegrate themselves into the societies to which they once belonged. Their time spent as soldiers deprived them of invaluable opportunities, such as education. Furthermore, these children often lack the appropriate psychosocial support required for their reintegration.

While tackling this issue, we need to remind ourselves that children under armed conflict are disparately vulnerable. Programmes to support them must address their unique needs, as these children often lack the knowledge and experience to make the appropriate decisions on their own. Furthermore, in most cases it is difficult to expect the States affected by armed conflict to cope with the situation alone. It is indispensable that the whole of international society supports the conflict-affected States in funding and sharing good practices. In that context, I would like to commend the activities of UNICEF to support conflict-affected children. I can refer to the projects in the Central African Republic, the Sudan, Cameroon and so forth. Japan has contributed $81.5 million over the past seven years to these challenges throughout Africa, the Middle East and Asia. We are committed to continuing our efforts.

The issue of displaced children is one of the challenges that has proved even more complicated in the past 20 years. Those children are deprived of access to education and health care. When the growth of children is hampered, that could lead to marginalization and possibly to the further rise of violent extremism — depending upon the circumstances, of course. Efforts should be made to provide education and health care to those children. Japan is ready to continue its support in these areas as well. We have provided such health-care support as hygiene assistance and vaccinations for refugees and internally displaced persons, including children. We have also provided temporary classrooms and educational equipment for children affected by armed conflict.

Last but not least, monitoring and reporting mechanisms based on resolution 1612 (2005) have been critical for the progress so far. Information gathered by this mechanism is the foundation of structuring supporting activities for the children in need. The Security Council must continue to address this agenda, as violations of the rights of the vulnerable — in our context today, the children — can threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. Japan will continue its active efforts to promote this agenda.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I join others in welcoming the briefings from the Secretary-General, Special Representative Zerrougui and UNICEF

Executive Director Anthony Lake. Their specific examples and the scale of the numbers that they just gave underline how important this is.

At the outset, I should like to express my gratitude for the latest annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2016/360). I also recognize the hard work that goes into this, and I really want to thank the United Nations country task forces for all that they do, often in very difficult circumstances, to provide reliable evidence-based information on violations against children. As the Secretary-General said, they are courageous.

Sadly, as we have heard today, the evidence shows that children continue to be targeted, maimed and killed in conflicts across the world, so I should like to focus my remarks today on two issues in particular.

First, as we heard so clearly during last week's meeting on Aleppo (see S/PV.7744), the continuing violence in Syria is putting the lives of hundreds of thousands of children at risk. Continuing attacks on populated areas, hospitals and maternity and paediatric words, in particular by the Syrian regime and its allies, all are having a devastating impact on children's welfare, their physical and mental health and, ultimately, their future. The children of Syria risk becoming a lost generation, one without hope or prospects. Tony Lake rightly pointed out the importance of education just now. That is why the United Kingdom is championing the essential role that education can play for children affected by this conflict. Education can restore hope; it can create prospects. We are building on the success of the "No Lost Generation" initiative, which has helped more than a quarter of a million children access schooling in Syria and the region, to develop "Education Cannot Wait", a fund for education in emergencies that was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit. That fund aims to address chronic underfunding by raising $1.5 billion to reach more than 13 million children. It aims to significantly improve how that money is spent through supporting better ways of working together. The United Kingdom has committed $40 million to Education Cannot Wait over the next two years, which will help reach more than 4.5 million children and young people by 2018. I call on all Member States to support this initiative today.

My second point concerns the sexual exploitation and abuse of children by United Nations peacekeepers and personnel. Children expect and trust peacekeepers to protect them. Every time a peacekeeper fails to so, that trust is undermined and, with it, the integrity of the United Nations. It is absolutely crucial that respect for children's rights within United Nations peacekeeping operations be strengthened. The adoption of Security Council resolution 2272 (2016) was a step in the right direction. Zero tolerance must mean zero tolerance. So we now need to see implementation of the commitments we made in the resolution.

Troop-contributing countries as well as non-United Nations forces must swiftly, thoroughly and transparently investigate all allegations of violations against children committed by peacekeepers. Perpetrators must be held to account and receive the harshest of sanctions for child sex offences. If perpetrators are not held to account by their own systems, we fully support the Secretary-General's ability to repatriate military and police peacekeepers, and we fully endorse his decision to prohibit the States listed in the annexes to the report on children and armed conflict from contributing troops to United Nations peacekeeping.

Given the clear need for a greater focus on child protection in United Nations peace operations, we are also concerned by the potential consequences of consolidating this work into the human rights component of such missions, so we believe that this change needs to be kept under review. The key here is for the United Nations to preserve the specialized role of child protection advisers and their direct, not mediated, access to senior leadership. They must be allowed to continue their important work in advocacy with Government and dialogue with parties to conflict.

One other quick point before I conclude. It will come as no surprise that we do not agree with Russia's characterization just now of what is going on in Ukraine. Abiding by international law has been a key element of this debate. That must apply to Russia's actions as much as to everyone else's.

Let me close with this final point. As we reflect today on how much we have to do, it would be remiss not to acknowledge how far we have come in this past year. Last year, more than 8,000 children were released from the hell that is life as a child soldier. That is 8,000 children putting down their guns and picking up their lives, 8,000 children now looking to the future and hope, not inferior. In March, the Sudan signed an action plan with the United Nations on ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers. It was the last

Government with underage soldiers in its forces to do so. And in May, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia signed an agreement with the Government of Colombia to release all remaining child soldiers. This was a vital step in bringing a decades-long conflict to an overdue conclusion.

These are historic commitments, perhaps unthinkable 20 years ago, when the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306) was released. Such commitments would not have been possible without the mandate of the Special Representative, and they will have a huge impact on children's lives across the world when they are implemented.

So yes, there is much more to do. We can make a difference; let us all work together to do so.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to wish you a very productive month. I also thank you for having convened this very important open debate to mark the 20-year anniversary of the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306). I should like also to express my gratitude for the briefings given by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Special Representative Leila Zerrougui and the Executive director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake.

Uruguay supports the statement made by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Conflicts today more than ever have a marked impact on the civilian population, in particular children, given their particular vulnerability, and, in the twenty-first century, continue to represent one of the major threats to the protection and promotion of their human rights. Uruguay has historically been committed to respecting and promoting the rights of the child and, among other things, we have promoted year after year the General Assembly resolution on this item.

My country categorically condemns the repeated violations of the human rights of the boys and girls, and reiterates its dismay at the fact that they continue to be killed, maimed, mutilated, kidnapped, and subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence, recruited as child soldiers and used in acts of war, as the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360) sadly points out.

Also of particular concern is the situation of girls sold into slavery as well as the victims of abduction and those forced into sexual unions or forced or early marriage. These practices represent a flagrant violation of their human rights and have an irreversible impact on their physical and mental integrity as well as their future development. Also reprehensible is the growing use of explosive weapons and aerial bombings against civilian targets perpetrated by various parties to armed conflicts, including schools, hospitals and populated areas, which deprives children of access to education and has an adverse effect on the provision of humanitarian assistance.

In Syria, indiscriminate air attacks against civilian targets and zones are the main cause of death and maiming of children during the period covered by the report of the Secretary-General. The actions of armed groups also prevented 35,000 children from being vaccinated. According to the report, the number of attacks against schools and hospitals doubled in Yemen in 2014, with 59 attacks against hospitals and 42 against schools.

We are also dismayed at the impact of terrorism and violent extremism on the promotion and protection of the human rights of children. According to the report of the Secretary-General, more than 6,500 schools have been destroyed, damaged or used as shelters in Syria, while terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, or Da'esh, continue to use education to indoctrinate and recruit children.

The report of the Secretary-General highlights the serious violations being committed against children. In this situation, the adoption of urgent measures is an inescapable moral duty and a legal obligation of the international community towards current and future generations. That is why my country, while it reiterates its firm commitment to eradicating violence against children, also calls on the countries that have not yet done so to sign or ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and Convention No. 182 of the International Labour Organization, on the prohibition of the worst forms of child labour, which are based on the Cape Town Principles adopted in 1997.

We also reiterate our concern about the continued violations by the parties to armed conflicts of the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law, including those related to the protection of civilians and in particular children. All parties to conflicts must fully comply with the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols

of 1977, which are of vital importance to respecting the rights of the child. As underscored today by the Secretary-General, even in time of war certain rules must be followed. We also call for effective compliance with, and the implementation of, resolution 2143 (2014), resolution 2225 (2015), with regard to children abducted by non-State armed groups or recruited by State armed forces, and resolution 2286 (2016), which was adopted in May, with regard to attacks on medical facilities and personnel.

Among other measures to be taken are those designed to address the basic needs of the large number of children who are displaced owing to armed conflict, many of whom are unaccompanied minors and could be subjected to serious violations or be recruited by parties to conflicts within refugee camps or zones. In that context, it is crucial that States of origin, transit and destination ensure the protection of displaced children and guarantee their access, especially to medical assistance and education. The international community must also fight against impunity and adopt measures against those responsible for serious violations against children. When appropriate, the perpetrators should be referred to the International Criminal Court, since the Rome Statute categorizes as war crimes those involving sexual violence and the conscription or enlistment of children under the age of 15 or using them to participate actively in the hostilities of armed conflicts.

We would like to refer to a subject we consider to be of great importance, namely, the reintegration of children who have been involved with armed groups and have been victims of violent extremism and have suffered other serious violations of their rights, in particular in cases of abuse or sexual exploitation. For their social reintegration, we need the commitment of the State concerned, but also the cooperation of the international community. Children should be considered first as victims, and be treated as such within the framework of legislation and a juvenile legal system oriented to their social rehabilitation. We must also create protective environments, including programmes and services for social and psychological care to overcome the effects of the experiences of conflict and facilitate their rehabilitation and reintegration in the community as a key element of the post-conflict process. The implementation of effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes to promote the well-being of affected children is of particular importance in that regard. We understand that these efforts must include short-, medium- and long-term plans and must have adequate human and financial resources for the reintegration to be effective and sustainable over time.

Education is another vital factor in achieving reintegration, as it offers children valid alternatives to a future that often is presented as grim and devastating. Children who have grown up experiencing violence on a daily basis lack such concepts as how to live in peace or how to have respect for human life. That is why there must be education to train them, first in those lacking concepts, such as peaceful social coexistence and respect for human rights. Secondly, through education we must offer these children professional opportunities and economic security to enable them to break the cycle of violence and prevent them from being forced to resort to delinquency or to joining other groups that commit illegal or terrorists activities.

In the United Nations and the Security Council, we must redouble our efforts to address the terrible situation faced by children who are victims of violent conflicts. Uruguay supports the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and reiterates the importance it attaches to fulfilling her mandate. We value the role played by instruments that are part of the children and armed conflict agenda, including the annual report of the Secretary-General, the list attached to his report and the monitoring and reporting mechanism. These instruments are necessary and fundamental since accurate, timely and objective information on serious violations committed against children during armed conflicts would help the parties to a conflict to comply with international standards on the protection of children and accountability.

That is why Uruguay expresses its concern about the fact that States Members of the Organization are using pressure to avoid international scrutiny, such as is the case with the suspension of the coalition operating in Yemen from the list annexed to report of the Secretary-General. These actions are particularly disturbing, primarily because they undermine the effectiveness of the instruments adopted to provide a response and a solution to the serious violations committed against children in conflict situations.

I would like to conclude by referring to the role that can be played by peacekeeping operations with respect to this agenda. As a troop-contributing

country, Uruguay shows on the ground its unequivocal commitment to protecting the civilian population in general and to children in particular by supporting the recommendation to include specific provisions for the protection of children in all peacekeeping operations. In that regard, we understand that we must strengthen within these operations the monitoring and information functions on violations committed against children and provide them with experts in the field and devote financial resources to that end. Moreover, we must also provide training on the protection and prevention of sexual exploitation to troops before deployment.

The history of humankind shows that wars do not produce winners, but rather victims and destruction. Among the millions of deaths, injuries and those suffering from physical and psychological wounds persons, the main victims of armed conflicts are children. According to UNICEF data on children born in conflict, 86.7 million children have experienced only war in their lives. This terrible reality shows that armed conflicts robs them of their childhood, safety, their family and feelings, robs them of their innocence and denies them the right to play, learn and have fun like other children. They have been denied for long enough; it is now our collective responsibility make sure they are not denied their future, their opportunities or their dreams.

Some day all of us will have to learn that children are untouchable.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I would also like to appeal to all speakers to deliver their statements at a reasonable speed so that interpretation may be provided accurately.

I wish to inform all concerned that we will carry on this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Erlan Idrissov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Idrissov (Kazakhstan): Let me first of all commend Malaysia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the current month. I would like to join in thanking Ambassador Ramlan Bin Ibrahim for convening this timely and important open debate to address the grave violations against children in armed conflicts. I would like to formally thank the Secretary-General, whom I saw a few moments ago, for his insightful remarks earlier and for his tireless and sincere efforts to address this painful issue. My delegation commends Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, whom I was able to congratulate personally, and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for their tireless efforts to tackle this problem.

Despite all international action and increased global concern, children continue to be disproportionately affected during and in the aftermath of conflicts. This situation calls for strong and urgent action by Member States. My country fully endorses UNICEF's Children, Not Soldiers campaign and urges the speedy and full implementation of its action plans designed to end violations against children.

We call for increased political will and the commitment of Member States to shifting to a broader perspective by sustaining long-term rehabilitation and reintegration of children, child soldiers and, especially, girls into normal life. Education programmes, vocational training and adequate psychological support need to be integrated so that former child soldiers are treated as victims rather than security threats.

We believe that the machinery of the non-governmental organization community, such as Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, Save the Children Alliance and the Geneva Call, should be mobilized to get more non-State actors to join the latter's "Deed of Commitment". We are convinced that every effort should be made to protect schools, hospitals and humanitarian facilities from attacks in order to ensure safe access to education and health care. In that regard, my country co-sponsored resolution 2286 (2016), recently adopted on this matter. Kazakhstan has also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and calls on parties to conflicts to uphold its Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

Realizing the important role that education can play in promoting peace and stability, we have allocated a total of more than $53 million for various humanitarian projects in Afghanistan. Our record of assistance

includes the construction of schools and hospitals in that country and the funding of annual scholarships for Afghan students.

As a State fully committed to its international obligations, Kazakhstan ratified, in July 2011, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and accordingly adapted its own national Children's Rights Act. We also introduced legal measures to prohibit the enlistment of persons under the age of 18 or their use as mercenaries, and strengthened the relevant provisions of our national criminal code. As part of our school curriculum, we focus on interfaith and inter-ethnic education in order to form a national identity based on the shared human values of tolerance in a global civilization, and thereby prevent violent extremism.

We would like to suggest the following recommendations for strengthening the capacity of the United Nations to protect children in armed conflict.

Thia grave situation demands that a child-protection mandate be incorporated into the work of the Security Council and of peacekeeping and political missions, with dedicated child-protection capacity at every level. Intensive special training of troops, police and civilian personnel before deployment would ensure effective detection, tracing, rescue and rehabilitation operations, as well as monitoring and reporting procedures on behalf of child victims. Child protection should also be an integral element of all peace processes.

Of late we have learned of despicable plans of the self-proclaimed group called the Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams, or Da'esh, to massively use children to train future terrorists. These are absolutely reprehensible and unacceptable plans, and we should respond in a united and global manner to foil them.

Another aspect of this issue is mass migration and refugee flows. In the case of mass refugee flows, States of origin, transit and destination must be held accountable to fulfil their obligations to uphold the rights of children.

All aspects of this integrated approach call for greater coordination between all States Members of the United Nations, specifically the members of the Security Council, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the United Nations country teams on the ground and, of course, the Human Rights Council.

It is an honour for Kazakhstan to have been elected to serve on the Council for the years 2017 and 2018. We pledge to undertake that responsibility with the utmost seriousness, and we see upholding the rights, dignity and protection of children in time of conflict as a most sacred mission.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiolea (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Malaysia for convening this open debate, and the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of UNICEF and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for their respective briefings.

My country aligns itself with the statement to be made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict.

Mexico condemns any activity that violates the rights and well-being of children and adolescents, including situations of armed conflict, where the essential rights of children are especially affected.

Today's debate is particularly relevant, as it celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the introduction of the issue into the agenda of the Security Council. At that time there emerged a consensus and an international awareness regarding the importance of preventing and addressing recruitment and use of children by armed groups under any circumstances. In the 20 years since then, we have made significant progress, such as the inclusion of the lists of perpetrators of grave violations against children in the annexes to the reports of the Secretary-General.

Nevertheless, we are also aware that there remain worrying challenges, as is the case with the noted increasing intensity of serious violations in various armed conflicts, the prolongation of such conflicts and the resulting increased forced displacement of children, and the use of violent extremism and the recruitment of children by different parties to armed conflict.

These facts must serve to reaffirm our collective determination to keep the subject at the centre of the international agenda. The Government of Mexico reiterates its support for the important work of the Office of the Special Representative. It is essential

that the work of the Office, in particular through the monitoring and reporting mechanism, be respected by all involved. Reports should be accepted and valued, because their content constitutes transparent and objective advocacy for the best interests of children in situations of particular vulnerability.

We also express our deep concern over the consequences of the increase in recent years of forced displacement of children. Displaced and refugee minors are doubly vulnerable to becoming victims of serious human rights violations. It is essential that the Council reiterate its calls for all parties to a conflict and the international community to respect international law and the human rights of children, who are the main victims of conflict and violence.

That is why Mexico has agreed to be one of the pathfinder countries of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, an initiative that seeks to ensure the conditions for children to enjoy a life without violence. We reiterate the commitment of our Government to work outside and within Mexico to promote this global initiative. We also reiterate our support for the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, launched in 2014 by the Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF, and our unwavering commitment to achieve its goals.

We welcome and will follow up in a timely manner the measures taken by the Organization to prevent and combat violence and sexual abuse committed by United Nations personnel in peacekeeping operations of which children have been the unfortunate victims. We consider it essential to ensure compliance with the policy of zero tolerance for exploitation and sexual abuse committed by civilian or military personnel of peacekeeping operations or any other force authorized by the Security Council, and to bring to justice those who have committed them.

We reiterate our call on the members of the Council to promote measures that contribute to full respect for international law; include specific provisions for the protection of minors in peacekeeping operations and special political missions by mainstreaming child protection in the field; encourage warring parties to include in peace talks or negotiations measures for the protection of children; require the sanctions committees that have not done so to include in their work criteria for serious violations of the rights of children in order to strengthen measures against systematic perpetrators of these violations; and provide more systematic follow-up to the decisions and recommendations of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, particularly when considering conflict situations under its agenda.

Finally, I wish to reiterate that full respect for the rights of children can be achieved only in peace and security. The prevention of conflicts and the search for sustainable peace must therefore be priority objectives of the international community. We need to redouble our efforts, in line with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1), to find long-term solutions to mitigate the causes of armed conflict, care for the most vulnerable populations and mitigate the harm done to victims of serious violations of international humanitarian law in post-conflict settings. In that regard, Mexico's priority before the Council will be to continue to prevent and alleviate the suffering of those who are the future and present of our societies. Our ethical and moral obligation is to protect the rights of children in all circumstances and to turn environments of adversity into environments of opportunity for all children around the world.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to begin by congratulating Malaysia on assuming the presidency of the Council and organizing this timely open debate.

According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360), 2015 was, sadly, another horrific year for children trapped in conflict zones and targeted by warring factions with no respect for international humanitarian law or the welfare of our children. The complete disregard for civilians, including children, exhibited by Da'esh, Al-Qaeda and their affiliates, especially in Syria and Iraq, has been particularly shocking, and the proliferation of these tactics among such groups worrying. Violent extremists have adopted widespread abduction as a feature of their operations to inflict terror and for the purpose of political brainwashing, ransom, retaliation or sexual exploitation. Boko Haram's gangs have been ravaging parts of Nigeria and terrorizing children. Likewise, the targeting of the children of religious and ethnic minority groups is also a matter of grave concern.

The situation of children in Yemen, and especially the United Nations-verified sixfold increase in the

number of children killed and maimed, is also a matter of great concern. The Secretary-General's report indicates that, of a total 1,953 child casualties, including 785 children killed and 1,168 injured, 60 per cent of them were caused by air strikes. This marks an exponential and unacceptable leap compared to the entire year of 2014 and makes clear how the intensity of the conflict in Yemen can lead to humanitarian crises.

The Secretary-General's 2015 report on this issue (S/2015/409) and other United Nations agencies attest to the fact that, only in Gaza between 8 July and 26 August 2014, 540 Palestinian children were killed, 2,955 injured, among whom as many as 1,000 were estimated to be permanently disabled as a result of the latest Israeli invasion of Gaza. The number of schools, kindergartens and hospitals damaged or completely destroyed by Israeli forces during the same period is the highest recorded numbers of all situations in 2014. The international community, including the Security Council, should ensure serious follow-up efforts to bring an end to Israel's impunity and to secure justice for the victims. This impunity has led to actions taken by the Israeli Government "that further restrict the rights of Palestinians, including children" (*S/2016/360, para. 79*).

In the face of children killed and their homes, schools and hospitals destroyed, it is disappointing that undue pressure and lobbying were exerted that could change the course of events. Last year, Israel was not blacklisted despite flagrantly targeting children in Gaza. This year in Yemen, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition was first blacklisted, based on United Nations findings that it was directly responsible for 60 per cent of child casualties, including the deaths of 785 children due to bombing campaigns. But surprisingly, its name was finally removed from the list.

Finally, have the ongoing airstrikes in Yemen, which have already led to the deaths of hundreds of Yemeni children, had any result other than strengthening Da'esh and Al-Qaida? While the world seems mostly unconscious of and indifferent to the killing and suffering of Yemeni children, can the international community be protected against the growing strategic threat of terrorism and violent extremism?

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I congratulate Malaysia on its accession to the Council presidency and wish it every success in its endeavours. We also thank the Malaysian presidency for inviting us to participate in this debate and welcome Malaysia' leadership role in the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

I also thank the Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui and UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake for their briefings.

It has been 20 years since the publication of the Graça Machel report on the impact of armed conflict on children (see A/51/306). Despite ongoing efforts to protect children since the question of children and armed conflict has been inscribed on the agenda of the Security Council, and despite the limited progress that has been made — such as the Children, Not Soldiers initiative and others — children are still the primary victims of armed conflict.

My delegation is very concerned about the increase in the number of serious violations of children's rights. We strongly condemn the atrocities described in the report (S/2016/360) of the Secretary-General committed by such groups as Da'esh, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, as well as other religious movements. Such groups exploit children, maim them, deprive them of freedom, abduct them and sexually exploit them.

The deterioration with regard to the situation of persons displaced by conflict has had a serious impact on chidren, including in South Sudan and Syria. My delegation emphasizes that the best way to provide the protection children need is to ensure sustainable peace and prevent or contain conflict. That must also include ending occupation of all kinds and complying with international law and international humanitarian law.

Palestinian children are the first victims of Israel, which is continuing its military occupation and pursuing its terrorist and aggressive policies. It is also continuing its siege and its violations of international law without fear of sanction or being brought to justice. Israel continues to use excessive force against children, including executions. Israel holds children in its prisons, where it mistreats them, tortures them and exploits them. Children are tried by military courts, even if they are not of age to stand trial. Their homes are destroyed. They are forcibly displaced. Hospitals and schools are attacked. And that is to say nothing of the crimes committed by the terrorist settlers.

Once again, we call on the Security Council to make Israel bear the legal and criminal responsibility for the serious violations it commits. We call on the Council to compel Israel to release child prisoners and to stop exploiting and abusing them. We call for an immediate end to the occupation, in line with the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant international instruments. We also call for a return to the 1967 borders. And we call for support to a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is very concerned about the suffering of children in Syria. We condemn the daily attacks by Syrian forces in which children are killed or disfigured and their homes are destroyed. The air raids continue. In fact, they are intensifying. We see the continued use of barrel bombs and the deliberate targeting of schools, hospitals and medical personnel. My delegation resolutely condemns the practices by Iranian Basiji forces, which are organizing campaigns to conscript children to fight in Syria. We also condemn the strengthening of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Syria, as well as activities by Hizbullah and other religious militias. They all commit crimes against children in Syria.

We also condemn the detention of children by security forces. Often children are tortured, resulting in their death.

Syrian authorities are using siege as a weapon of war. Aleppo today is being threatened with massacre and ethnic cleansing. Children are imprisoned under the rubble of their homes because the international community is ignoring them and failing to protect them — in fact, it is exposing them to death. Children, women and the elderly in Aleppo are calling out for help. Aleppo has experienced many massacres. If this is not addressed, it will be a stain on the Security Council and on the conscience of the international community.

We encourage the Council to immediately provide protection for the children in Aleppo and in all Syrian cities. We call on the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to play its role to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches the people who need it in Syria.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has responded to the call for help from the President and the people of Yemen following the coup d'état by the militia against former president Saleh. In line with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, a coalition was established in Yemen, with all the necessary resources deployed to ensure that we achieve the coalition's goals, including protecting children, women and the elderly. There is also a provision for a transition, in accordance with the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative.

We have also supported the mediation efforts of Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen. While the mediation has led to results, the opposition continues to dig in its heels. The Security Council should condemn that stance by the rebels, including ensuring that they comply with the provisions of resolution 2216 (2015), as well as the provisions of the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and the outcome of the National Dialogue.

When we talk about civilian victims in Yemen we must also recall that the Houthi militia has committed many crimes, including using hospitals and schools as barracks. They are responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians, including children. This militia has also committed attacks against my country at its borders, causing almost 500 civilian deaths, the displacement of thousands of our citizens and the destruction of buildings and infrastructure — 1,700 houses and 75 Government buildings destroyed, including hospitals and other medical facilities. Those attacks led to the closure of schools, disrupting the education of thousands of children. Since the end of the fighting on 10 April, the Houthi militias and their allies have committed nearly 1,700 incursions into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including the use of 20 missiles, resulting in many civilian deaths.

My delegation condemns in the strongest term the conscription of children by the Houthi militia. Coalition forces have handed over such children to the Yemeni authorities to be returned to their families after they are given assistance, including financial aid, in cooperation and coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNICEF. I am here to say that the coalition forces are holding no children in Yemen. They have all been released.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the coalition forces are committed to abiding by international law and international humanitarian law. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recently endorsed resolution 2286 (2016), which calls for those who perpetrate crimes against civilians and children or attack hospitals and other medical facilities to be brought to justice. In that regard, we have adopted clear rules of engagement to protect

civilians, adhering to the principles of proportionately and discriminate targeting. The use of weapons against civilians is prohibited, and civilians are protected until they can be evacuated from conflict zones. Operations in Yemen are subject to periodic comprehensive review to prevent harm to civilians.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia makes children its absolute priority and firmly believes that they should always come first. There is no reason to target civilians in conflict, especially children. Children should be in school and not fighting on the front lines. Children have the absolute right to life and education and to play far from flying bombs and bullets. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is unequivocally committed to protecting children and civilians and attaches the utmost importance to any allegation concerning violations of the rights of civilians by the Kingdom or coalition forces. We have established a task force to investigate such incidents and allegations of attacks on civilians, and shall submit our findings to the United Nations as soon as possible.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was among the first countries to participate in the reconstruction efforts in Yemen. Between 2010 and 2015, we contributed $3.25 billion, of which $1.2 billion went to economic development and strengthening the health sector. We have been the principal donors of humanitarian assistance in Yemen since 2015. Over the past year, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre has distributed more than $440 million throughout Yemen. We are also providing humanitarian assistance to Yemeni refugees in Jordan and the Sudan. We have hosted more than 1 million refugees, and all Yemeni children are allowed to enrol in our schools and universities. We have provided medical facilities and services to those who have been injured in Yemen or are hosted in other countries, as well as psychosocial support for the victims of landmines, including children.

In conclusion, I wish to stress the following points. We welcome the role of the United Nations and its agencies, and their efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict, especially children. It is also our view that the United Nations should be able to complete its missions successfully without its decisions being subject to undue influence. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will always be among the first to offer assistance to the United Nations system, but we also believe that the Organization must fulfil its duties neutrally and transparently. It must make special efforts to secure reliable information and not depend on unreliable sources when draftings its reports and other documents, which should seek to improve the living conditions of children in armed conflict.

We regret the lack of accurate information in the current report that led to the inclusion of the coalition on the list of entities violating the rights of civilians, without valid cause. We were not given an opportunity to provide any advance feedback, and we welcome the Secretary-General's courageous decision to remove the coalition from the list. I recall that we invited the United Nations to dispatch its officials to Riyadh to discuss the situation with us. That invitation remains open.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Let me thank you, Madame, for convening today's important debate, and all those who have spoken.

Luxembourg fully associates itself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union, and that of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Twenty years ago, in August 1996, Graça Machel published her report on the impact of armed conflict on children (see A/51/306). Since then, we have collectively developed, step by step, a child protection mechanism that is among the unquestionable successes of the United Nations. We have done so in consensus, united in the conviction that children represent that which is most sacred to each nation. Through this mechanism, with the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the monitoring and reporting mechanism at its core, tens of thousands of children have been rescued, freed from armed ranks, reintegrated into their families and returned to school.

All countries whose national security forces are listed in the annexes the Secretary-General's annual reports have now signed an action plan with the United Nations to end grave violations against children. This owes much to the increased mobilization for the Children, Not Soldiers campaign launched by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF in 2014. We welcome the fact that the Sudan made that commitment by signing an action plan on 27 March, in the presence of Ms. Leila Zerrougui. It is now time to build on that political resolve to arrive at the full implementation of the action plan as soon as possible.

In addition to the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, other progress made over the course of the past year should be noted, such as the intensification of dialogue between the Special Representative and non-State armed groups, which, as we know, constitute the majority of parties to conflict mentioned in the annexes to the reports of the Secretary-General. That has already produced results for Colombia. We also welcome the decision by the Secretary-General to suspend all participation in peace operations of troop- or police-police contributing countries that are listed in the annexes to his annual reports.

While progress has been made, however, much remains to be done. The annual report of the Secretary-General indeed paints a bleak picture of the situation in 2015.

In Afghanistan, children are disproportionately affected by the upsurge in attacks. Last year, one in four civilian casualties was a child. In Syria, the mass recruitment and use of children by Da'esh continued, as did attacks carried out by the Government against schools and hospitals, owing in large part to the increased use of air strikes and explosive weapons in populated areas. Cases of child abduction remain all too common in Iraq, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, where they have increased yet again. In Yemen, the number of children killed or maimed during the year 2015 increased six-fold.

Given that, we reiterate our unequivocal support for the mandate of the Special Representative, who is working tirelessly to protect children in armed conflict. The independence of her work should not be questioned. We count on everyone to respect it. We reaffirm our unwavering confidence in protection instruments, including the monitoring and reporting mechanism set up by the Council to verify the accuracy of all information included in the annual reports and their annexes. The report is the result of extensive consultations among the concerned Member States within the United Nations system — at Headquarters and on the ground.

We reiterate our desire to see child protection advisers continue to exercise their specific mandate in the missions concerned. That is why we continue as well to concretely support the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Similarly, we have decided to support a research project of the United Nations University being carried out in partnership with UNICEF, which must help develop tools to better guide the work of United Nations personnel on the ground to prevent children from coming into harm's way and protect and extract them from situations of extreme violence.

While this year marks the twentieth anniversary of the children and armed conflict agenda, we must redouble our efforts to strengthen the protection of children. If determination falters, we will be judged harshly by history.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Thoms (Germany): Let me start by thanking the Presisdent for convening this debate. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General, Special Representative Leila Zerrougui and Executive Director Anthony Lake for their comprehensive and very insightful briefings.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union and with the statement by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Twenty years ago, in August 1996, Graça Machel presented her seminal report (see A/51/306) to the General Assembly on the impact of armed conflict on children. The normative framework that we have developed since then has contributed to some major successes. Some 150,000 child soldiers have been freed. Nine parties to conflict have successfully implemented action plans to end and prevent the recruitment of children, and were subsequently removed from the annex to the Secretary-General's reports. As former Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Germany is proud to have contributed to the development of this indispensable framework. Yet in spite of those achievements, children, along with other civilians, are increasingly and deliberately under attack, leaving them vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse. Germany remains particularly concerned about the increase in grave violations recorded by the Secretary-General in Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

The children and armed conflict agenda remains more relevant than ever. It is both a matter of urgency and a key priority to further strengthen the United Nations mechanisms for the protection of children and implement them impartially and objectively. There

are numerous examples for how those mechanisms have very tangibly improved the lives of thousands of children on the ground. Notably, all eight Government armed forces listed in the Secretary-General's annexes have now signed national action plans and committed themselves to specific steps to end the victimization of children. We welcome the most recent adoption of such an action plan by the Sudan, and expect that it will now be swiftly implemented.

Germany commends the work of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict and fully supports her mandate. Through her campaign Children, Not Soldiers, Special Representative Zerrougui has tirelessly spread a key message: children are victims, not perpetrators, and must be treated accordingly. We would also like to applaud the United Nations field missions for their day-to-day work in implementing the monitoring and reporting mechanism — the key element of success of the children and armed conflict agenda. We need to ensure that United Nations missions continue to receive dedicated and appropriate resources for their child-protection work.

The discussion on how to advance the children and armed conflict agenda is still overly New York-centred. But New York can only develop guidelines. The implementation needs to happen elsewhere. Germany is therefore committed to raising awareness for the protection of children on the ground. Child protection and the re-integration of former child soldiers into their respective societies remain an important element of our bilateral discussions with partners. We will continue to support the formation of local groups of friends on children and armed conflict. The recent formation of the Group of Friends in Afghanistan is such an example, and Germany is proud to take over the chairmanship of that group.

Finally, the discussion on children and armed conflict in the Security Council must not be limited to this type of thematic debate. We need to further strengthen the operative language on child protection in the country-specific resolutions of the Council. It therefore comes as very welcome news that the renewed mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq now contains a stand-alone paragraph on the protection of children in Iraq. Germany applauds the tireless efforts exerted by Malaysia to mainstream the children and armed conflict agenda throughout the work of the Council.

As we now stand, 20 years after the presentation of the Machel report and five years after the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011), on attacks against schools and hospitals during the last German presidency of the Council, let me conclude by reaffirming Germany's unfailing commitment to the protection of children victimized by armed conflicts and to Special Representative Zerrougui and her team. The implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda is more urgent than ever and will remain one of our top priorities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): At the outset, I would like to commend the Malaysian presidency for organizing this debate and to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Zerrougui and UNICEF Executive Director Lake for their briefings and for their work in identifying ways that will help us in better preventing and responding to the scourges that continue to affect children in armed conflict.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union and with the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. I wish to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

The celebration this year of the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the mandate of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, which we strongly support, represent an invaluable occasion to assess the developments and the failures made by the international community in this area. During this period, remarkable progress has been registered in the demobilization of child soldiers and in their reintegration into their communities of origin. Most of all, 20 years on, we particularly welcome the evolution of a stronger normative and institutional framework for the protection of children in armed conflicts, mainly through the institution of the monitoring and reporting mechanism established by resolution 1612 (2005).

Last year, two more remarkable steps were taken: the adoption of resolution 2225 (2015), which recognizes abduction in armed conflict as a listing criterion in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual reports, and the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1), in

which Member States committed themselves to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers. But much more relevant than those documents and resolutions is their concrete implementation. In that regard, Italy's contribution to that very sensitive issue is multifaceted.

First, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council during the period 2007-2008, we strongly supported the inclusion of specific provisions on the protection of children in the mandates of the United Nations peacekeeping operations, which is now the standard practice of the Council, and we actively participated in the drafting of resolution 1820 (2008), on sexual violence and armed conflict, which was the first resolution to openly recognize that sexual violence, when used as a tactic of war, may exacerbate conflicts and impede the restoration of peace and security. We stand ready to do our part again as member of the Security Council next year.

Secondly, we continue to be engaged through our training centres. The oeace operations review provided useful recommendations on how this important topic can be considered in planning and conducting peacekeeping operations. We believe that the targeted training of United Nations personnel on children's rights has to remain paramount to ensuring effective peacekeeping on the ground.

Thirdly, we renewed our political commitment to humanitarian law, being threatened by the involvement of non-State actors in conflicts. In this spirit, Italy joined the Safe Schools Declaration, which supports the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, promoted by a coalition of countries, United Nations actors and non-governmental organizations. In line with our commitment, we also support campaigns such as Children, Not Soldiers, launched in 2014 by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF. Campaigns like this are an essential instrument for guiding the action of the international community in bringing an end to violations against children.

Fourthly, given the growing trend of abuses and violence committed against children in current crises, we are promoting and implementing long-term initiatives for the recovery and social integration of former child soldiers and victims of conflicts through our development cooperation programmes, in particular in the Middle East and in Africa.

Finally, given the unprecedented and steady rise in mixed migration flows on the Mediterranean central route, we are putting in place a new ad hoc legal framework in order to better assist and receive minors coming from conflict areas, thus strengthening the implementation of their rights. In particular, after having increased the financial resources dedicated to unaccompanied minors from €90 million in 2015 to €170 million in 2016, Italy is committed to taking in more unaccompanied minors and being better equipped to receive them: 2,000 more reception centres will be available by the end of 2018, and highly specialized services will be provided, based on the principle of the best interest of the child.

Let me conclude by saying that all these commitments and measures cannot be decoupled from the need to bring perpetrators to justice. Accountability at national and international levels is key to ensure that no more children are involved or used as soldiers in armed conflicts. With the Sustainable Development Goals, we committed ourselves to end recruitment and use of child soldiers by 2030. Let us work together to transform this promise into a reality.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mrs. Chartsuwan (Thailand): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Viet Nam and my own country, Thailand.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate Malaysia, a fellow ASEAN country, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August and on its chairmanship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We also commend the initiative to hold this annual open debate. Let me also express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his opening remarks, as well as for the briefings provided by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and by the Executive Director of UNICEF.

We recognize the contribution of the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306) published 20 years ago, which

called the international community to action to address the effects of armed conflict on children. Since then, the international community and the United Nations have taken up this issue seriously and have made great strides in reducing the suffering of children in armed conflicts. Awareness has been raised, institutions have been established, criteria has been put forth and initiatives have been launched and implemented. Since then, many children have been released from armed forces. The Children, Not Soldiers campaign has gained momentum and many, if not all, Governments are now engaged in ending violations against children. Yet children continue to face growing threats from new conflicts and the urgent rise of violent extremism.

We share the view that a comprehensive approach is needed to protect children in armed conflicts. While stressing the primary responsibility and authority of States, we once again emphasize the need to address the root causes of hardship that children bear. It is just as important that the Security Council and the international community continue their efforts to address the impact of armed conflict on children, including through the formulation of a long-term strategic plan for their reintegration and rehabilitation.

The monitoring and reporting mechanism established in accordance with resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2008), 1998 (2011) and 2225 (2015) is a key instrument of the United Nations child-protection mandate. The integrity and credibility of the mechanism and the work of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict should be supported by constructive engagement with Member States and the use of accurate, objective, reliable and verifiable information in reporting.

The Secretary-General's annual report (S/2016/360) plays an important role in guiding Member States in their efforts to strengthen child protection in armed conflicts. All listing efforts should be objective and comprehensive, based on credible and impartial information, must take into account efforts made by Member States and must be in line with the principle of the responsibility and authority of States. Furthermore, in implementing the mechanisms and action plans already in place, it is important that all the relevant actors be properly informed and coordinated. The Council should continue to take a cooperative approach and provide necessary assistance to the relevant parties that cooperate with the United Nations.

At the regional level, ASEAN member States have been stepping up efforts to tackle issues that children face, both at national and regional levels, as well as in institutional and practical areas. In November 2015, our leaders adopted the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Elimination of Violence against Children, which provides a comprehensive framework for regional action for a period of 10 years from 2016 to 2025, ranging from prevention to monitoring and evaluation. ASEAN also closely cooperates with United Nations agencies and their mechanisms.

ASEAN Member States remain strongly committed to combating violations of children's rights, anywhere, and by any one. Let us work closely together to ensure the betterment of our children's lives, because they are also our common future.

In my national capacity, allow me to briefly share a few points.

Thailand would also like to align its national statement with the statement to be delivered by Slovenia on behalf of the Members of the Human Security Network.

Thailand is of the view that efforts through national strategies to promote the rule of law and quality education and improve socioeconomic conditions can contribute to the promotion and protection of children's rights. We also welcome the efforts of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in its endeavours to end all violations against children by engaging constructively with Member States and all stakeholders. Lastly, Thailand remains committed to fulfilling its international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols to ensure the protection of our children in all instances. We would like to echo the call for the universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Zehnder (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland thanks the Malaysia presidency for the organization of this open debate, as well as the briefers for their instructive briefings.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306), which described the impact of armed conflict on children and alerted the

international community about the devastating effects of war on girls and boys. It is largely due to the report that the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict could be created. During the past 20 years, we have seen many positive developments with regard to the fate of children in armed conflict; for example, the release of more than 115,000 children from armed forces and armed groups since 2000 and the signing of 25 action plans with parties to conflict towards halting violations against children.

However, as we have heard from the briefers and previous speakers, there is little cause for celebration on this anniversary. The latest briefing of the Special Representative Secretary-General outlined worrying trends affecting children in armed conflict around the world. That is why the time has come to discuss the key issues raised by the Malaysian presidency.

With regard to the international collaborations that have been successful in enhancing the protection of children in armed conflict, including the fight against impunity for serious violations, Switzerland wishes to mention its support for the international non-governmental organization Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice. This initiative has contributed in northern Uganda to rehabilitating and reintegrating former female Lord's Resistance Army soldiers into their families and communities, while also advocating that crimes sexual violence be brought before the International Criminal Court (ICC). States must conduct investigations and bring to justice the perpetrators of these crimes in order to render justice for the victims as well as to prevent further violations. When States are unable or unwilling to do so, the International Criminal Court can play a decisive role. In that regard, we welcome the initiative of the Prosecutor of the ICC, who is implementing a specific policy for children.

With regard to the recommendations on how to address the persistent risks faced by children in armed conflicts, Switzerland believes that counter-terrorism measures are necessary and can contribute to helping children. However, we must ensure that such measures do not impede humanitarian efforts. My country pays particular attention to the importance of engaging in dialogue with all parties to armed conflicts on the matter of the protection of children, especially in areas controlled by armed groups. In addition, we believe it is particularly important to ensure the protection of children who are detained because of their suspected or actual links to armed groups.

With regard to concrete proposals to improve the protection of children, Switzerland encourages the Secretary-General to continue to include information on the specific impact on children of attacks against schools, hospitals and their staff in his reports to the Council. We also call for the full and immediate implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). Furthermore, my country calls for a vigorous response to the allegations of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse committed by United Nations personnel, notably involving the ban for the Government armed forces mentioned in the annexes to the reports on children in armed conflicts from contributing troops for peacekeeping operations.

Finally, allow me to remind States that we, as States, established the mandate for the protection of children in armed conflicts through resolution 1612 (2005). Therefore, it is also our responsibility to safeguard the integrity and credibility of the mandate. Switzerland also wishes to express its unqualified support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, who has done outstanding work to ensure the protection of children in armed conflicts.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Charles Whiteley, Chargé d'affaires of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Whiteley: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I wish to warmly thank today's briefers, and in particular Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui, to whom we lend our full support. We also want to thank the Malaysian presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's debate.

Serious challenges for the protection of children affected by armed conflict remain. Protracted conflicts and humanitarian crises have severe impacts on many children and leave them exposed, inter alia to the threats of violent extremism and displacement, which the Secretary-General rightly highlights in his

report (S/2016/360). Violent extremism is significantly affecting children, who often are direct targets, including the abhorrent practice of using children as suicide bombers. Approaches to fighting and preventing violent extremism need to be comprehensive and to address the root causes, such as protracted conflict, but also the lack of good governance, the rule of law or education.

We note with growing concern the prevalence of attacks on and the use of schools and hospitals for military purposes. Governments and all other actors must protect schools and hospitals by upholding the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We also see forced displacement as a particular challenge, with an ever-growing number of children fleeing in search of protection, making them particularly vulnerable to crime, such as abduction and sexual violence. Governments must also take urgent action to protect the rights of these children.

This year's report is an acute reminder of the vital work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and of United Nations agencies, in particular by providing objective and impartial information as the basis for the report. The lists in the annexes to the report are an essential tool in holding the relevant conflict parties accountable for the grave crimes committed against children. It is therefore of the utmost importance to protect the integrity and impartiality of the report, including the listings in its annexes and the children and armed conflict agenda of the Security Council. Ending violations against children and implementing action plans, rather than political or financial pressure, should be the only route to delisting. All parties to a conflict need to be held to the same standards when applying the listing criteria. We fully support the call of the Secretary-General on all parties identified in his report to work with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to protect children in conflicts.

Last year was marked by very disturbing cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, including by United Nations peacekeepers, other international forces and civilians. In addition to the need for ensuring full accountability, one crucial measure would be mandatory and comprehensive predeployment training on child protection to ensure the effective protection of children on the ground. But there is also progress that can be achieved on this agenda. Colombia is a good example in that regard, with substantial progress achieved in the peace talks and the agreement on the release of children by Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia.

The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for the period 2015-2019 ensures a comprehensive human rights approach to conflicts and crises. The issue of children and armed conflict is mainstreamed in our common security and defence policy, missions and operations. Child protection considerations are addressed during the planning process in new missions and operations, in our predeployment training and in our reporting and review documents.

EU development aid supports several projects for child victims of armed conflicts by promoting their safe access to basic services, protecting them from all forms of violence and ensuring their reintegration into societies. Specific projects in this field are supported under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Instrument contributing to stability and peace and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument — for example, in Colombia, Yemen, Ukraine and Syria.

In 2015, EU humanitarian aid dedicated over €11.5 million to specific child-protection activities, including psycho-social support, mine-risk education and actions against the recruitment of child soldiers, as well as their reintegration — for example, in the Syria crisis, in South Sudan, in Ethiopia and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2016, the EU is quadrupling its humanitarian assistance to education in emergencies. The humanitarian projects selected under the €52 million package for education in emergencies will enable safe access to quality education. Recently, the EU also decided to update the list of priority countries on children and armed conflict to align it with the Secretary-General's report.

Furthermore, the EU and its member States continue to be strong supporters of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, and we welcome the significant progress that has been made. The focus in the remaining months of the campaign will be on the implementation of the action plans. The EU stands ready to support Governments in this phase, together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF.

In concluding, let me underline that the United Nations and its member States should ensure that everything is done to effectively protect children

affected by armed conflict and provide them with better prospects for the future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Heumann (Israel): We meet here to discuss the impact of war and conflict on our most valuable and precious resource: our children. We are at a time when the plight of these children is more desperate than ever. Approximately 250 million children, one out of every nine boys and girls on the planet, are forced to grow up in a war zone. In 2015, when the number of displaced persons worldwide reached an all-time high, 50 per cent were under the age of 18.

The ongoing violence in so many parts of the world has destroyed families, leaving the youngest to struggle to escape the devastation of war on their own. Nearly 100,000 asylum-seekers across 78 countries are unaccompanied or separated minors, facing their difficult fates vulnerable and alone — 100,000.

The stories emerging from those who managed to escape are horrifying and alarming. These figures are staggering, but we must not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenges before us. Each and every child deserves a future free of war and violence.

All the trend lines show an increase in the most horrific forms of violence and oppression, directed at the most helpless among us. Children are used as suicide bombers and exploited as sex slaves, and girls and boys not old enough to drive a car are being forced to operate weapons of war.

It is difficult to find the words to describe the scale of the atrocities we have seen in the past few years — acts of sustained barbarism and cruelty that shock the conscience of the civilized world. Thousands and thousands of children have been killed in Al-Assad's brutal campaign against the people of Syria, while tens of thousands live in constant fear for their lives. Torture in State prisons, barrel bombs exploding in the streets and shells landing in their homes: the worst atrocities have not spared the children of Syria.

In Yemen, widespread and systematic attacks by the Saudi-led coalition against civilian targets such as hospitals, schools, and mosques continue. Almost 2,000 children were killed or maimed last year. The Saudi-led coalition alone is responsible for the deaths of and injuries to about 1,200 children.

Across West Africa, 44 suicide bombings were carried out by children in 2015, three quarters of them by young girls. This is the devastating reality of child sacrifice in the twenty-first century. And these are the unimaginable circumstances faced by young girls like Fati, one of the hundreds of young girls kidnapped, imprisoned and forcibly married by Boko Haram. Fati described how the captive girls would volunteer as suicide bombers, offering to strap bombs to themselves, in the desperate hope of escaping from a life filled with constant fear, terrible hunger and daily sexual violence. Fati escaped with her life, but an untold number of children still live this daily nightmare. Such brutality and cruelty against children not only tear at our hearts; they unravel entire communities and destroy the fabric of a society.

In Israel, we know all too well what it means to face enemies who systematically exploit children as weapons of war. In the north, the internationally recognized terrorist group Hizbullah has transformed the villages of southern Lebanon into terror outposts. They place rocket launchers next to kindergartens where youngsters play and store missiles under the homes to which children return after school. For years, Israel has warned the Council of the dangers of the illegal smuggling and the continued build-up in southern Lebanon, but our warnings have fallen on deaf ears.

In Gaza, the terrorist group Hamas uses young boys to dig their terror tunnels and uses children of all ages, along with their mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters, to serve as human shields. Hamas deliberately embeds their terror infrastructure in the schools, hospitals and civilian neighbourhoods of Gaza, knowingly placing their own children in harm's way. No child should play in a schoolyard that doubles as a rocket-launching site, and no child should spend his or her summer being drilled on how to make and engage in war.

Contrary to all of the basic international legal rights of children, Hamas conducts annual military camps and recruits thousands of children. Instead of learning how to swim or play soccer there, the children of Gaza are taught how to assemble automatic weapons and operate shoulder-fired missiles. But Hamas is not only exploiting their own children, it is also teaching them to see every Israeli child as a potential target. We were reminded of this all too clearly when, just last month, a rocket fired from Gaza hit a preschool in the Israeli town of Sderot. Fortunately, this time no one

was hurt, as the rocket exploded just a short time after the schoolchildren had left the building. Unfortunately, we know that Hamas will continue to target our homes and schools, to make our children live in constant fear of the next attack.

It is the responsibility of leaders everywhere to protect children at all costs from the ravages of war and to shelter them in a protective environment where they can thrive. Unfortunately, the Palestinians are failing at this most critical responsibility. Instead of nourishing their youth with the dreams of a bright future, Palestinian children are fed a steady diet of hatred for Israel and glorification of violence in the lessons they learn in school, in the sermons they hear in the mosque, and in streets that are named after terrorists.

As the recently published Quartet report states,

> "Palestinians who commit terrorist attacks are often glorified publicly as 'heroic martyrs'. Many widely circulated images depict individuals committing terrorist acts with slogans encouraging violence ... and [this] is particularly affecting young people." (*S/2016/595, annex, p. 4*)

We are paying the price of this glorification of terror on the streets of Israel today. Since October, Israel has faced a tide of terror. Forty people have been killed and more than 500 injured as Israelis continue to endure attack after attack, day after day, week after week, and month after month. In this wave of ongoing violence, 47 of those acts of terror — stabbings, shootings and car rammings — have been carried out by Palestinian youth under the age of 18. They have attacked, injured and killed men and women of all ages, including 22 Israeli children.

Just last month, a 17-year-old Palestinian stabbed a 13-year-old Israeli girl to death, in her bed, as she slept, in her family's home. Imagine a young girl sleeping comfortably in her bed stabbed over and over in cold blood by a child just a few years older than she is. Children killing children: this is the direct result of the venomous hatred preached to children in Palestinian society. For the sake of peace, for the sake of the children on both sides, the international community must send a clear message to the Palestinian leadership. Children are our most precious gift. They deserve to grow up in a society that fosters a vision of hope and promotes an education that preaches peace instead of hate, tolerance instead of violence and mutual understanding instead of martyrdom.

Before concluding, let me say that earlier this month, the world lost a true man of conscience and a voice for humanity. Elie Wiesel lived through the horrors of the Holocaust as a child, and throughout his adult life he warned of the dangers of failing to stand up to evil. Wiesel famously said, "The opposite of love is not hate. It is indifference".

The voices of children around the world are crying out to us for a sign that they have not been forgotten. We dare not be indifferent to these cries.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Monsignor Kassas (Holy See) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation wishes to thank the Malaysian presidency for having convened this important meeting on children and armed conflict and conveys to Malaysia its appreciation for all that it has done and will continue to do as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

The year 2014 was described as one of the worst years for children affected by armed conflict. But as the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2016/360) for 2015 illustrates, the 2014 horror list has been surpassed by the number of children caught up in armed conflicts and the scale and severity of violations in 2015. As the Secretary-General states in paragraph 4 of the report,

> "The impact on children of our collective failure to prevent and end conflict is severe, and the present report highlights the increased intensity of grave violations in a number of situations of armed conflict". No one can ignore this damning observation. Never in recent memory have so many children been subjected to such violent brutality: children used as soldiers, suicide bombers, sex slaves and disposable intelligence-gatherers in the most dangerous military operations. The deliberate destruction of their schools and hospitals, in total disregard of international humanitarian law has, become a strategy of war. My delegation fully agrees with the report that the use of air strikes and explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas exacerbates the dangers to which children caught up in armed conflict are exposed. These crimes must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

The Holy See has been a constant partner of the United Nations in opposing not only the use of children as combatants, but the many other forms of violence against children caught up in armed conflict. Through its various structures operating in most of the conflict zones, the Catholic Church is actively engaged in taking care of the victims of such violence. Over the years, Holy See structures and numerous Catholic institutions have collaborated with United Nations peacekeeping missions and agencies to help alleviate the sufferings of children in armed conflict and to share best practices to address this ongoing scourge. While expressing deep appreciation for all those who work in this area, the Holy See hopes that the plight of children caught up in armed conflict will awaken consciences, lead to a change of heart and inspire all parties to lay down their arms and take up the path of dialogue.

Moreover, while the international community plays an important role in supporting States in their primary responsibility to protect their citizens, it must also interact with the local communities affected by violence against children in armed conflict so that solutions and programmes can emerge organically and at the same time foster local ownership. A solution to the plight of children caught up in armed conflict, in particular of child soldiers, requires sensitivity to finding ways to reintegrate these children back into their own communities.

While we witness barbaric acts beyond anyone's imagination committed also by child soldiers, we must remember that these children are exploited and manipulated into what they have become. Therefore, while their reintegration into society requires that we recognize the atrocities they may have committed, we must also build pathways for counselling and reconciliation, and do that with a view to accomplishing fully the reintegration we seek.

The obligation to put an end to barbaric acts against children caught up in armed conflict is incumbent upon every one of us. More specifically, it is incumbent upon the Council as it calls on all States to put in place and implement stronger measures for the protection of children in armed conflict and as it ensures that United Nations peacekeeping operations strictly adhere to all laws and measures in this regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Sandoval Cojulún (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Malaysian delegation for organizing this open debate and for its concept note (S/2016/662, annex), which contains useful guidelines for focusing our discussion. We are also grateful to the presenters this morning for their valuable briefings.

We associate ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the representative Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict.

This debate is an ideal opportunity to, on the one hand, commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306) and the consequent development of monitoring and reporting mechanisms and, on the other, to consider impartially how much needs to be done to prevent egregious violations from being committed against children, as they are an affront to our humanity, deprive our children of a better world and have devastating consequences for the victims, their families and the communities where they reside.

We recognize the valuable contribution being made by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in condemning the six serious violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. We stress that it is imperative for the proper implementation of her mandate to systematically gather accurate, impartial and timely information on serious violations committed and to provide the resources and leadership required so that data can be collected in the field, in particular through peacekeeping operations and the respective United Nations agencies.

It is worth emphasizing that the monitoring and reporting mechanisms should contribute to accountability and to ensuring strict compliance with international legal standards, in cooperation with national Governments. They must be based on facts and not be exposed to political pressures. As the Secretary-General indicated today, the focus should be on protecting children.

We condemn the arrests, mass abductions and deaths of children in counter-terrorism operations. We underscore that the detention of children without charges must be ended. Security forces must hand over children associated with armed groups to child protection authorities and facilitate their proper rehabilitation through education and vocational training programmes. We must also address the trauma caused so as to break the cycle of conflict, ensure the best interests of the

child and respect the child's fundamental condition as a victim. In that regard, we urge Governments and the international community to ensure that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes receive the resources necessary to operate effectively.

We welcome the establishment of initiatives that strengthen the international condemnation of violations perpetrated against children. We believe the achievements of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign have been a success, and we encourage States to redouble their efforts to fully implement their action plans next year, as the Secretary-General indicated. Furthermore, we recognize the growing support for the Safe Schools Declaration and its Guidelines. Guatemala is in the process of confirming its endorsement of the Guidelines.

Accountability is key to preventing serious violations and should be at the core of national and international responses. Political and financial support by regional organizations and the international community will be necessary to ensure the institutional framework and that the progress achieved is sustainable. This accountability is extended to the Blue Helmets deployed in the field. Guatemala reiterates its full commitment to the zero-tolerance policy. The Council must ensure that those responsible are prosecuted and are included in sanctions regimes, and it must redouble its efforts to strengthen national capacity in the judiciary and strengthen the international legal framework. Among other things, we must also ensure that perpetrators are handed over to the International Criminal Court. We are in favour of strengthening the dialogue with the Court and its mandate on this issue.

Finally, we would like to welcome the recent ratification by Uganda of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We urge all Member States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Mr. Marn (Slovenia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Human Security Network (HSN), a cross-regional network made up of Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Panama, Switzerland, Thailand, my own country, Slovenia, and South Africa, which is an HSN observer. The Human Security Network is an informal group of States that advocates a people-centred, holistic approach to human security to complement the more traditional understanding of national and international security.

I would like to thank today's briefers for their briefings, and the Malaysian presidency for convening today's open debate on children and armed conflict, an issue that has long been a priority for the Network.

Twenty years after Graça Michel presented her report (see A/51/306) on the impact of armed conflict on children, the Human Security Network observes with growing concern the increasing numbers of children that are negatively affected by situations of armed conflict and other situations as referenced in the latest report (S/2016/360) of the Secretary-General (S/2016/360) and in today's briefings.

Millions of children continue to be caught in the middle of armed conflicts, not only as bystanders but as recruits or as targets of multiple acts of violence, such as attacks against schools and hospitals, abduction, mutilation and sexual abuse, as well as the use of hunger, disease and exploitation as tools of war. We also note with concern that, according to the latest report of the Secretary General, attacks on schools and hospitals and related personnel were prevalent in 2015, which demands our immediate and collective attention. In that regard, we call for the implementation of resolution 2143 (2014), which contains important provisions to ensure and protect the right of education for children.

Child protection in all situations remains the responsibility of every State in accordance with obligations under international law. It is essential that national accountability mechanisms be strengthened in order to ensure that perpetrators, including members of non-State armed groups, members of national armed forces and peacekeepers, who commit grave violations against children are brought to justice. It is the responsibility of all States to investigate and prosecute those responsible for violations against children, put pressure on the perpetrators and support the necessary measures to address these violations.

It is necessary for the United Nations to work in close cooperation with the Governments concerned. In many armed conflicts where non-State actors commit horrific crimes against children, the United Nations must be fully aware of the sensitivities on the ground and needs to work closely with those Governments to address the situation and provide assistance to children and their families.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) may also have an important role to play in this regard. The existence of grave violations against children in armed conflict must be determined impartially and objectively based on facts on the ground. Convictions and sentencing by the ICC have marked a critical turning point for all children victims of rape and murder in armed conflict, as the Court acknowledges rape as a weapon of war and the concept of command responsibility.

Monitoring and accurate and timely reporting are crucial to ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable for violations. The monitoring and reporting mechanism established in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions is a key mechanism of the United Nations child-protection mandate. The integrity and credibility of the mechanism and the authority of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict must be strengthened and supported, especially by engaging with Member States and using accurate, objective, reliable and verifiable information, thereby ensuring the impartial and evidence-based listing of perpetrators.

The Human Security Network furthermore highlights the importance of focusing on the prevention of future violations and rehabilitating and reintegrating those who have been affected by conflict through medical and psychosocial care.

Reiterating the call of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in May 2016, we would like to see the universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We remain deeply concerned about the safety of children in all armed conflicts, and therefore urge all Member States to keep the concerns of children and their well-being high on the international agenda.

Allow me now to add few words in my national capacity as representative of Slovenia.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Canada, who spoke on behalf of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict.

Slovenia has been concerned by the attacks against schools and hospitals. In April 2016, we expressed support for the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration and the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. We encourage other countries that have not yet done so to support and implement the Guidelines.

We believe that education presents an important element of the psychosocial rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict. We therefore support several projects being carried out by a Slovenian humanitarian non-profit organization, the International Trust Fund Enhancing Human Security, and other Slovenian non-governmental organizations, aimed at addressing the needs of children in Lebanon, Palestine and Ukraine.

Last autumn, many people, including children, sought refuge in Slovenia. We highly value the cooperation with UNICEF, which offers psychosocial and other assistance to these children.

The latest annual report of the Secretary-General reminds us that we have not yet succeeded in protecting children from grave violations committed against them in conflicts. We are appalled that in many of the 20 countries addressed in the report the situation has actually deteriorated. We call for a scaling up of efforts to protect the most vulnerable — the youngest among us — and with them our future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Denmark.

Mr. Nielsen (Denmark): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries — Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and my own country, Denmark.

We would like to express our gratitude to the Malaysian presidency for holding this open debate at such a critical time for children around the world. We thank the Secretary-General for his opening remarks, and we acknowledge the Special Representative for her tireless efforts and the critical work she has done on behalf of children, as well as UNICEF for the equally important work it has done.

Children should not be exposed to war, not as victims or witnesses, nor as soldiers. Therefore, our efforts continue in order to prevent children from ending up in the crossfire, as well as in armed groups or forces. In the 2015 annual report (S/2016/360) of the Secretary-General there is a glimmer of hope. Last year, strong engagement with non-State armed groups led to the release of over 8,000 children. With the Sudan coming on board, we welcome the fact that all the Governments identified for recruitment and use

of children in their security forces are now engaged in the action plan process. We look forward to working closely with the Sudanese Government to help in the implementation of the action plan, including through the local group of friends led by Sweden and Canada. In Colombia, we are heartened by both the Colombian Government and the readiness of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo to include the protection of children in peace talks. Also, the progress in Government commitment to the protection of children during conflict in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar, as stated in the report, is an indication that things might change.

However, much of the report is heartbreaking to read. There are still far too many parties to conflicts listed for grave violations against children. Thousands of children have been killed during over five years of war in Syria. The highest number of child deaths and injuries last year were recorded in Afghanistan. Somali children face an unbearable situation. In Yemen, the escalating conflict has had a devastating impact on children, and grave violations against children have increased dramatically.

Let me be very clear: all parties must respect their international legal obligations to protect civilians. Child protection concerns must be included in all negotiations to end conflicts. Given that armed non-State actors — such as Da'esh, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram — account for the vast majority of violations, further reflection on new forms of engagement is needed. I would like to emphasize three points that are particularly important for the Nordic countries.

First, protecting the integrity and credibility of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, as well as the Office of the Special Representative and the Children and Armed Conflict agenda itself, is imperative. It is essential that the verification of grave violations against children in armed conflict is determined impartially and objectively. The issue of listing and delisting of parties must be based on factual findings on the ground.

Secondly, children's access — in particular girls' access — to quality education in war and disasters must be ensured. Education is a vital part of protecting children during conflict. Attending school can create a sense of normality and a vision for a better future in an otherwise chaotic situation. There were attacks on education in at least 70 countries between 2009 and 2013. Since then, such attacks have escalated further. We must increase our efforts to uphold the right to education, even in conflict situations. By making schools safer for children today, we are protecting the future.

Finally, as our third point, training in child protection for civilian and military personnel is key, particularly to avoid any incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse against children. We believe that predeployment training within these areas should be mandatory for United Nations personnel. The Swedish Armed Forces International Centre offers a child-protection course based on United Nations child-protection curriculums. Also, we need to protect child-protection advisers in United Nations missions in order to properly document and verify child rights violations.

We need to let children be children. The challenges we face are a call to action. In that regard, we reiterate our full support for the Special Representative and her Office, as well as the crucial work by UNICEF, other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations in the field. We wholeheartedly support the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, which has led to tangible progress since it was launched. Moreover, it is time that we pay more attention to child protection as a part of peace negotiations. Regrettably, as today's debate shows, we have a lot of work ahead of us.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lithuania.

Mrs. Jakubonė (Lithuania): I have the honour to speak on behalf of Estonia, Latvia and my own country, Lithuania. Our delegations associate themselves with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. I will deliver an abridged version of our statement. The full text will be available on our Missions' websites.

Let me start by thanking Malaysia for convening this open debate, and all the briefers for their presentations. We would also like to express our appreciation for the dedicated and passionate work of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and UNICEF in that regard.

Twenty years after the ground-breaking Graça Machel report (see A/51/306), important advances to protect children in armed conflict have been made. Despite the progress, the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360) depicts a distressing situation for children in armed conflict. Countless children across the Middle

East and Africa, as well as Europe, continue to suffer from conflict-related violence.

In recent years, extremist groups have inflicted direct violence against children, including killing and maiming, abductions, torture and brutal sexual violence. Besides being victims of extremist violence, children are also used to perpetrate acts of terrorism, war crimes or crimes against humanity.

In many conflict situations, schools remain under attack or are used for military purposes as barracks, detention facilities and weapons storage facilities. All Member States must fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of schools. Targeting schools or using them for military purposes gravely endangers the lives of children and denies their access to education.

Children involved in armed conflict first and foremost are victims. No matter their role, they are exposed to acute levels of violence — as witnesses, victims of various abuses and as forced participants. Administrative detentions and prosecution for their alleged association with armed groups are unacceptable.

Children affected by conflicts face difficulties in finding their place in society; even their local communities tend to stigmatize and reject them. Proper long-term and comprehensive programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict should be put in place. It is crucial to provide necessary psychological, medical and legal assistance for children and their families to ensure their successful reintegration into daily life. We have to use all available tools to empower children to participate in political processes and ensure their social inclusion.

Child protection work in United Nations peacekeeping operations must be prioritized with further deployment of child-protection advisers and targeted training for all contingents and United Nations personnel on children rights. The role of a mission's leadership is crucial in ensuring that child protection is considered a priority by all components of the mission. Adequate resources should be allocated to ensure successful mandate implementation.

We are concerned that despite the zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse by the United Nations and related personnel, sexual abuse by peacekeepers remains a systemic challenge. Despite the progress made, a lot needs to be done to ensure that there is no room in peacekeeping missions for those who prey on the most vulnerable.

In conclusion, protecting children from serious crimes and preventing such crimes go hand in hand with tackling impunity and ensuring that perpetrators are held to account. While the perpetrators are too many, the cases and judgments against them remain too few. We have to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice by redoubling our own efforts to enhance national judicial capacities and by strengthening the international justice framework, including through the work of the International Criminal Court.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Alyemany (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate Malaysia on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and for convening today's open debate. I wish to convey my delegation's thanks to the Secretary-General and to Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for their briefings. I also thank Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF. My delegation appreciates the opportunity provided today to take the floor before the Council.

Over the past 18 months, Yemen has experienced the worst time in its modern history, following the coup that was organized by the Houthi militia, in cooperation with the former President. That period has been the worst time for Yemeni children and their families. The putsch forces have committed the worst crimes against children and against humanity. Hundreds of children have lost their lives as the result of attacks intentionally targeting populated areas and due to attacks by snipers. Many civilians have also been wounded. Moreover, many people have become disabled as a result of the attacks. Furthermore, those armed forces have targeted children, as well as schools and hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. We can still hear the cries of the martyred children through the voice of Farid Shawki, who cried out "Do not bury me!", as he was terrified of death.

The military forces of the Houthi militias and the republican guard forces of former President Saleh have targeted many schools in Aden and other areas. They are the enemies of education and science. Those militaries have occupied the university, transformed it into a barracks and planted landmines on the university

campus as a form of reprisal against the students, who represent the future of Yemen. Leaders of the militias continue to visit schools and universities to recruit children to serve in combat. Children therefore make up the largest number of Houthi recruits — not only since the start of the war and the attempted coup, but since the creation of that militia.

The letter that we sent to the Secretary-General in response to his report (S/2016/360) reiterated that we are ready to cooperate with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We expressed our comments on the report, including regarding certain information that it contained about Yemen. We believe that those paragraphs do not go into sufficient detail, and we are curious as to the methodology used to verify cases included in the report. According to paragraph 2, the report was drawn up as a result of broad consultations among Member States. That is not the case with regard to Yemen. We received no request to discuss the contents of the report before its publication, in particular with regard to the sections pertaining to Yemen. That is not in conformity with procedures adopted by the United Nations, in particular in connection with this type of report.

In paragraph 165, it is stated that it was difficult to verify information owing to the security situation and restricted access. In that regard, I would draw the Council's attention to the fact that — as many speakers have noted — the accuracy of the information in the report was not verified. It is necessary to be objective and impartial when it is a question of numbers and figures. The report is therefore not credible. The authors of the report did not adopt an impartial methodology.

In paragraph 166, the report states that 183 boys were deprived of liberty by popular committees. The popular committees are fighting for the liberation of Yemen. The 183 boys in question were Houthis, and we detained them because they were combatants on the front lines. The report states that we detained those boys and have not freed them. Today, we reaffirm — as we have already told the Special Representative — that the legitimate Government is not holding any children. We have provided statistics to the United Nations, and we have released all the children. Furthermore, we released all other boys who had been transferred to us by the coalition. We are of course ready to cooperate with the United Nations on that matter.

The Government authorities provided a secure environment for those children in order to reintegrate them into society following the prisoner exchange. Unfortunately, the children were once again forced to fight on the front lines. In that regard, I note that the report makes no reference to the many regions and cities that are under the control of the militias. Those cities are nearly empty of children. That is a very foreboding indication. It must be said that there are cities that are empty of children, who have been recruited and are combatants.

The authors of the report have acknowledged that it was difficult to verify some cases, but the tone of the report is very firm in making its arbitrary accusations, the majority of which single out the Arab coalition. In that light, I commend the cooperation between the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the legitimate Government of Yemen.

In paragraph 175, the authors of the report do not say why there was no coordination with the Yemeni Government and its representatives to find the best ways to implement the action plan that we had adopted together with UNICEF in May 2014. We need to work in line with that plan.

In annex I of the report, which lists parties that recruit children, kill or maim children, there is an error in the part concerning Yemen with regard to the third point, according to which Government forces recruit children. We know, however, that the majority of Republican Guards brigades and the special security forces defied the legitimate Government and supported the leaders of the putsch. They are therefore accomplices in all the crimes that have been perpetrated against children. Moreover, the report mentions the First Armoured Division, but that Division no longer exits. It was dismantled in 2014. Unfortunately, this year's report of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict has been politicized. Given the very clear evidence, the report is not objective.

To conclude, I want to reiterate that we in the Government will work with the United Nations through the Children, Not Soldiers campaign and non-governmental organizations to stop the violations committed by the putschists and armed groups and to protect children from those criminal groups, which do respect no national or international law. These criminal gangs do not respect international law. The Government has an ethical, legal and constitutional duty to

implement a strategic plan to address the psychological impact of war on our children. Our children are the future of our country. We in the Government therefore are working to alleviate the suffering of children and end those violations. We will establish a centre for the rehabilitation of children who were recruited, forced to fight and then released by the fascist putschist factions. That is part of the Government's efforts to rebuild the country and reintegrate children into a normal life and allow them to resume their education.

Furthermore, we provide special support for children with disabilities, and we call upon everyone to work together to ensure that all entities that recruited children are held accountable for their actions. Having signed the peace plan in Kuwait on 30 June, Yemen hopes that the international community, in particular the Council, will play a more active role in pressuring the putschists to accept and sign the Kuwait agreement, lay down their arms and recognize the legitimate Government. We hope for peace, whereas the militias brandish slogans of death. They desire death for everyone, whereas we fight for life. The Government wants to strengthen peace and tolerance, while those responsible for the putsch favour violence. Tolerance will prevail.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Nard[i] (Liechtenstein): The annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/360) illustrates that the suffering of children in times of armed conflict continues, including forced abduction and sexual abuse, with very few truly positive developments to report. Accountability for perpetrators and the listing mechanism established under the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's mandate have continued relevance and importance. The monitoring and reporting mechanism established in resolution 1612 (2005) to document grave violations against children is a key element of the United Nations effort to protect the rights of children. The documentation used is based on information vetted for accuracy, leading to credible and evidence-based listing for perpetrators.

Like many others, we are deeply concerned about the pressure put upon the Secretary-General to redact the report produced by the Special Representative. Such pressure seriously jeopardizes the integrity not only of the mechanism, but also of others that the United Nations has put in place. It also offers a welcome pretext for other offenders to dismiss the credibility of monitoring and reporting. Such interference can undermine progress made by the mandate, in particular with regard to all the perpetrators. It also creates the impression that accountability is only asked of those who are not in a position of power vis-à-vis the United Nations system. We wish to express our strong support for the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and its independence.

The report of the Secretary-General illustrates the complex relationship between violent extremism and children in armed conflict. On the one hand, children fall victim to acts of terror intended to inflict maximum civilian casualties. On the other hand, extremist groups have exploited the vulnerability of children and used them by enlisting them to carry out acts of violence. In many of those cases, the decision to join violent extremist groups is made out of a sense of exclusion and hopelessness. The key challenge therefore lies in reducing the incentive to join terrorist organizations in the first place.

A preventive approach that fosters more inclusive societies for children through measures such as youth outreach programs and community-based projects can go a long way in that respect. A solely military and security approach will fail to address the underlying factors driving violent extremism. Instead, we must focus on tackling the root causes of conflicts and crises: lack of good governance, poverty and the absence of socioeconomic prospects. Doing so will help address the pull factors for the radicalization of children. Following the cessation of conflict, the reintegration and rehabilitation of these children should be prioritized. Psychological support and educational programmes are helpful tools in that respect. It is of the utmost importance to always respect the human rights of children, in particular when States treat children associated with violent extremism as security threats.

The Secretary-General's report reflects the troublesome number of sexual violence and abuse cases perpetrated against children this past year. We are concerned by the deteriorating situation in South Sudan, in particular the recent reports that United Nations peacekeepers took no action to prevent sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls directly outside of a United Nations camp. We welcome steps taken by the Council in resolution 2272 (2016) to repatriate units whose members have perpetrated such crimes. That was a much-needed step, but still fell short

of the need for full accountability and an effective end to impunity.

Much of the suffering of children in times of armed conflict is due to the alarming erosion of respect for international humanitarian law. A consistent political commitment on the part of the Council to ensure such respect, as well as our joint efforts to enhance compliance, can go a long way towards addressing this crisis of international humanitarian law. Along the same lines, it is vital that we make firm commitments to guaranteeing the human rights and safety of refugee and migrant children, while also providing them with livelihoods and income opportunities. As such, we are strongly committed to the preparations for the high-level plenary meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants on 19 September.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Medan (Croatia): Allow me at the outset to thank the Malaysian presidency of the Council for convening this debate. Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union, and with that to be delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. I would like to make several remarks in my national capacity.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their unwavering efforts in pushing this agenda forward, and in particular the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, who intensely and tirelessly advocates for the rights and well-being of children affected by armed conflict across the globe. Her active engagement in a case-by-case approach has significantly contributed to the integration of child protection into a number of peacemaking activities. In our view, her role is indisputable and its independence, authority and impartiality have to be fully supported.

Violations committed against children during armed conflict are today, more than ever, part of the changing nature of the armed conflict landscape. We are witnessing the practice of using children as suicide bombers, and a rise in attacks on schools and hospitals. All those acts represent grave violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law. It is especially worrying that millions of children worldwide are being displaced by armed conflict, many of them unaccompanied or separated from their families, which only further heightens the risk of their being exposed to a number of grave violations, including abduction and sexual violence, ill treatment and abuse.

While it is crucial to invest all possible efforts in preventing the recruitment of children and securing their release from armed groups, we must focus the same attention on the effective implementation of policies for the successful reintegration of former child soldiers and for addressing their long-term psychological and social needs. We should also provide all necessary support services to refugee and displaced children. Our involvement needs to have a special focus on the protection of girls, who are particularly vulnerable in armed conflicts as potential victims of rape, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, and early and forced marriage.

Member States must ensure that their military and police personnel uphold the highest human rights values and receive predeployment training in line with the United Nations standards, with a special focus on child protection work. In that vein, we should strengthen our responses to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations missions and demand full accountability at all levels. We absolutely cannot tolerate the fact that some of those who come to protect become perpetrators themselves.

Croatia fully supports the Children, Not Soldiers campaign and its aim to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces in conflict by the end of this year. We particularly welcome the fact that all Governments identified by the Secretary-General for their recruitment and use of children in their security forces are now engaged in an action plan process. We also take this opportunity to once again call on all countries to become parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

We wish to once again reiterate our strong support for the children and armed conflict agenda, and for the objectivity and impartiality of the tools established to monitor and hold parties accountable for grave violations of children's rights.

In light of the twentieth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict mandate by the General Assembly, we have to take pride in the development of a solid normative and institutional framework on that matter. But we also have to chart

a new way forward in ending the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and addressing all grave violations committed against them.

In that regard, we view it as essential that the monitoring and reporting mechanism, established under resolution 1612 (2005), maintain its impartiality and objectivity and continue to document the existence of grave violations against children based on facts on the ground. In that way, we will strengthen accountability, ensure compliance with international legal standards, and add to the further success of the children and armed conflict agenda.

To that end, we pledge here today our full and unequivocal support to finally bridging the gap between commitments and the actual practice towards ensuring a childhood free from fear and violence for all.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by congratulating Malaysia on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council for this month and by thanking you for your efforts in the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General; his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui; and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their briefings. We would also like to express our gratitude to the United Nations for its efforts in addressing this problem, which is a tremendous challenge for the international community.

We are seeing a growing and alarming increase in the suffering of civilians in armed conflict. We see children deprived of their innocence and their right to a dignified life. The Government of Kuwait is very concerned about the practices of armed groups that abuse, exploit and abduct children and subject them to sexual violence and exploitation. The international community must ensure that it addresses these dangers and that these groups abide by international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Whenever we take up the issue of children in armed conflict, we must consider in particular the situation of children in Palestine, where Israel's violations persist. Israel has been destroying schools and recreation centres, and imposed constraints such as checkpoints and the separation wall. We see how these measures are exacerbating the humanitarian situation there and deprive Palestinian children of their rights.

In that context, we must call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility to address these violations and to ensure that these children are in a position to hope that their legitimate rights will be defended. Recently, during the twenty-seventh Summit of the League of Arab States, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah announced Kuwait's intention of hosting an international conference to address the issue of the suffering Palestinian children face and Israeli practices, which are in breach of all international conventions.

I should now like to turn to the crisis in Yemen. We commend the Secretary-General's decision to remove the Saudi Arabia-led coalition from the list of countries that have committed violations. We are a member of that coalition, and we support that decision because the coalition seeks to restore the legitimate institutions of Yemen and has been in compliance with international law and international humanitarian law. We reiterate our call on the United Nations to send a delegation to Riyadh to familiarize itself with the measures that we have taken to protect civilians and children.

We are devoted to the restoration of the peace, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen and support the political process under way, in line with resolution 2216 (2015). As the Council is aware, since 2016 Kuwait has served as the host for the peace talks on Yemen. It is our hope that the parties will reach an agreement that can restore peace and security in that brother country so that it can redevelop and rebuild.

We see the situation in Syria deteriorating on a daily basis. We deplore the number of victims in Syria, where we note that more than 250,000 people, including 20,000 children, have died despite international efforts to alleviate the suffering of civilians. I note that we have hosted three donor pledging conferences. One was also held in London in February. Despite all those efforts, the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360) notes the indiscriminate targeting of residential areas and air strikes that have led to the deaths of children. Given this humanitarian disaster, the Security Council must identify a solution that can put an end to these serious violations of international law and international humanitarian law.

In conclusion, I recall that wars and conflicts affect all sectors of the population, but that children are the

most vulnerable and exposed and need our protection most. We must not frustrate their hope.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Krzywosądzki (Poland): Poland aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union and that to be delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. I would like to add a few comments in my national capacity.

First, I would like to thank the Malaysian presidency for convening this timely and important debate. It has been 20 years since the publication of the Graça Machel report (see A/59/306), which triggered the international community's actions to address the rights and needs of children in armed conflict. A lot has been done since then, but in many parts of the world tens of thousands of children continue to be deprived of their basic rights and a happy childhood because of ongoing armed conflicts.

In that context, Poland is deeply concerned about the increase in violence against educational facilities, students and teachers during armed conflicts. We welcome and support initiatives aimed at putting an end to the use of schools and universities for military purposes. The Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, which were finalized in December 2014 under the leadership of Norway and Argentina, are a good example in that regard. To confirm our commitment to effective implementation the Guidelines, Poland signed the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration. We believe that this initiative constitutes an important step towards the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, especially in conflict situations.

Poland is deeply concerned by the outrageous phenomenon of child recruitment by armed forces or armed groups. In that regard, we recognize the importance of such efforts as the Children, Not Soldiers campaign. We also appreciate the decision of the Government of the Sudan to sign the action plan to protect children from violations in armed conflict. We take note of the commitments made by the Governments identified by the Secretary-General in his recent report (S/2016/360) on the recruitment of children, as well as the notable progress achieved in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar.

As a country that initiated the negotiations for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Poland has actively contributed to the implementation of its objectives since its adoption in 1989. Recently, to reaffirm our dedication to those issues, Poland joined the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. We pledge to actively engage in the work of that important body.

Let me conclude by stating the simple truth that children do not start wars, but wars affect children's lives forever. It is the moral obligation of the entire international community, including the United Nations, Member States and civil society, to spare no effort to better protect all children from the effects of violence caused by adults.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have closely reviewed the fifteenth report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/360), which was prepared by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. In that regard, we would like to acknowledge that, at long last and with some reluctance, Ms. Zerrougui has focused on a small number of facts related to the recruitment of children by the terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups that have killed, slaughtered and dismembered children in the Syrian Arab Republic for more than five years now. In order to set the record straight, we would like to make the following remarks.

First, the report does not reveal, in its research and narrative, the main reason for the suffering of children and girls in my country, which is largely due to the systematic spread of the extremist Wahhabi Saudi ideology, consolidated by the House of Saud when, in the eighteenth century, it adopted the practices of the pervert Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab in killing, slaughtering and invading and in enslaving women. These perverted practices of Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab has have now reached the gates of Muscat and Karbala.

The whole world was shocked by the video of the horrendous slaughter of a Palestinian child, Abdullah Issa, who sat wounded and dazed while surrounded by human beasts belonging to a genetically modified opposition group some people consider to be moderate. The child was slaughtered in accordance with the

Wahhabi ISIL sense of legitimacy that allowed them to commit this disgusting crime.

But this crime is a genetically modified crime. The Nour Al-Din Al-Zenki group, a group of moderate thieves originating from Turkey that was described by the United States Ambassador at a previous meeting as consisting of "rebel fighters", as the Council will recall, is a terrorist group that follows the perverted Wahhabi intellectual way of thinking and receives financial and arms support from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Western Powers and the Erdoğan regime; it is this group that committed this "moderate" criminal act.

The conscience of the world has come to recognize how these Wahhabi regimes facilitated the murder of the innocent children killed in cold blood in the Al-Zara massacre, which was carried out by armed groups in a village in the rural area of Hama a few months ago, as well as other massacres perpetrated in Syria. These regimes had a contract with the Devil himself to implement a bloody programme that has killed innocent children in Syria and Iraq in front of schools and hospitals. These regimes were responsible for the drowning of the Syrian child Aylan on the Turkish coast of the Mediterranean, and for the deaths of hundreds of children following the aerial bombing by the international alliance led by the United States of America in the city of Manbij, in a rural area of Aleppo.

The Military Operations Centre in Amman, which includes intelligence services representing the United States of America, France, Turkey, Qatar, Jordan, Israel and Saudi Arabia, has now mobilized some 7,000 to 9,000 fighters on our borders inside Jordan. They intend to launch this barbarous moderate opposition on our southern border with Jordan in order for it to commit crimes against our children, destroy our infrastructure and attack the Syrian army. If this were taking place in any other State, would the Council have called these demagogues "the moderate armed opposition", or would they have dealt with them as thugs?

Secondly, the report fails to refer to the suffering of children in refugee camps in neighbouring countries, which is a critical issue. In this regard, we cannot but express our deep concern at the ongoing rape of children and the emergence of the phenomenon of the human slave trade in camps in Turkey and Lebanon. We are also deeply saddened at the new phenomenon of the trade in the human organs of these children, not to mention the rape and sexual harassment of Syrian children and women. The trade in organs in Turkish refugee camps such as the Nizip camp was reported by the Turkish mass media.

The Turkish newspaper BirGün published a story about the rape of 30 Syrian children ranging in age between 8 and 12. In addition, youth and children are recruited to join terrorist groups. On 5 June 2016, *The New York Times* published an article entitled "In Turkey, a Syrian child 'has to work to survive'". Instead of receiving education in a classroom, such children work hard all day long in textile mills. More than 1 million Syrian children live in Turkey, and thousands of them, unable to read or write, work in sweatshops and factories.

A few days ago, in the Rukban refugee camp in Jordan, two children died because of the difficult conditions there, including lack of health care and polluted water. The cause of death of one of them, who was 10 months old, was yellow fever, as a result of polluted water.

Thirdly, we stress the demand that Ms. Zerrougui's team investigate the fate of the hundreds of children abducted by elements of the terrorist Army of Islam, Liwa' al-Tawhid units and the Free Syrian Army in the areas of Damascus, Aleppo and Latakia. We reiterate the appeal made to the Security Council and Ms. Zerrougui's Office to determine the whereabouts of those children. We provided Ms. Zerrougui with electronic sites documenting cases of the recruitment of children by what is known as the Al-Nusra Front and the Saudi terrorist Abdullah Al-Muhaysini, and a tweet by the Saudi terrorist ideologue Mohammed Al-Arifi in which he addressed the moderate opposition. We also call on the Office of Ms. Zerrougui to provide us with the names of the five Syrian children who, according to the report, were recruited by Government forces into popular committees. So far we have not received any information in this regard.

We reiterate the same question to Ms. Zerrougui's team: why did the authors of the report fail to refer to the forced economic measures imposed on the Syrian people, further tightening the noose that is suffocating children in Syria?

Fourthly, the report totally ignores the suffering, anxiety and terror of Syrian children in the occupied Syrian Golan as a result of the occupation force's practices, such as the siege and torture of the Syrian population and its consequent ill effects on children.

The Israeli occupation forces put an infant under house arrest in the occupied city of Majdal Shams. His father was a student at Damascus University, and his wife, from the Golan, gave birth to her child in Damascus. When both of them returned after the husband graduated from Damascus University, the Israeli occupation forces arrested the infant, who was only a year and three months old at the time, and put him under house arrest for two years. This story has not been heard by Ms. Zerrougui.

Furthermore, the Israeli curriculum is imposed on Syrian children in the occupied Golan; they are being exploited economically, which affects their growth and overall health. In addition, 50 children in the occupied Syrian Golan have fallen victim to the more than 2 million mines planted by the Israeli occupation forces. Again, Ms. Zerrougui failed to hear this story.

Nor can we ignore the moral scandal represented by the failure of the Secretary-General to include the facts in Ms. Zerrougui's report with regard to the crimes committed by Saudi Arabia against the children of Yemen. Over 953 children were killed and over 1,168 children were injured before the report was published. Representatives are undoubtedly familiar with the political exploitation practiced by the Saudi delegation when they threatened the Secretary-General with using financial pressure and withholding financial assistance to United Nations specialized agencies.

All those who have shed tears before you, Mr. President, today over the plight of the Syrian children play a major part in the killing of Syrian children, adults and civilians. Many who spoke about my country in their statements are actually primary partners in killing our population. They shed tears for Aleppo, Idlib and are partners in those crimes. Now they are fanning the flames of action against Syria from the borders of Jordan. This is a crime par excellence.

The President: As we still have a long list of speakers, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Munir (Pakistan): I thank you, Mr. President, and congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. Our statement will be within the four-minute limit.

We appreciate the remarks of the Secretary-General and the focused briefings provided by his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and Executive Director of UNICEF Anthony Lake. We also commend the Special Representative for her determined efforts to protect and advance the rights of children trapped in armed conflicts.

As the Secretary-General said this morning, children are one of the primary victims of armed conflicts. Ominously, this disturbing trend shows no sign of abatement. Children continue to be killed, maimed, abducted and subjected to sexual violence as a consequence of conflict situations, neither of their making nor choosing. In the wanton destruction of conflict, countless childhoods have been lost, dreams shattered and hopes vanquished. Children also pay the heaviest price in forced migration of people as a result of conflict. These practices present formidable obstacles to the normative frameworks of humanitarian and human rights laws, in particular the rights of children.

We acknowledge the progress achieved during the last 20 years. Children, Not Soldiers is an innovative campaign that assures progress by laying emphasis on priority activities, road maps, benchmarks, deadlines and reviews, as well as active participation by listed countries. The theme of children and armed conflict has also effectively been mainstreamed into the Council's work. These efforts have contributed to the emergence of a global consensus that no circumstances justify recruitment and the use of children in conflict. The signing of multiple action plans to stop the recruitment and use of children and the various successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes to help children become productive members of the society are tangible manifestations of this consensus. Yet a lot more needs to be done.

Strengthening the compliance and accountability mechanisms applied to all parties — conflict States and non-State armed groups — is essential to stopping violations of children's rights and preventing recurrence. Perpetrators of violence against children need to be identified and brought to justice through national judicial systems, and where applicable, through the use of international justice mechanisms. The establishment of appropriate legal frameworks with investigative and prosecution capacities remain central to this purpose. Above all, the goal of protecting lives is intrinsically linked to the goal of preventing conflict. It is therefore

essential that the root causes of such conflicts are addressed and inclusive political solutions found.

Pakistan attaches great importance to the protection and promotion of the rights of children. We are proud to be one of the six co-initiators of the 1990 World Summit for Children, which provided a fillip to the accelerated ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Child. We are also in the process of ratifying the Convention's Optional Protocol on Children and Armed Conflict. Pakistan, as one of the world's largest troop contributing countries, has a proud history of conscientiously undertaking the task of protecting civilian lives, including those of children.

Pakistan supports the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We, however, believe that this mandate cannot afford accretion. The legal parameters of the mandate, as provided by Security Council resolutions, must be respected. In this context, we want to state for the record that references to Pakistan in the Secretary-General's report of 20 April 2016 (S/2016/360) are not within the purview of the established mandate of children and armed conflict. We hope this principle will be kept in mind while preparing future reports.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Laassel (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, to congratulate Malaysia for assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month and thank it for organizing this debate on children and armed conflict, as well as its commitment and tireless efforts in the framework of its chairmanship of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict.

I would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and the Executive Director of UNICEF Mr. Anthony Lake for their respective briefings and the details they provided.

Twenty years ago, the world committed itself to take action to combat the use of children in armed conflict. Indeed, the publication in 1996 of the pioneering Graça Machel report (see A/51/306) on the impact of armed conflict on children led to the establishment in 1997 of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Since then, the Secretary-General has submitted annual reports to the Security Council on this issue. Each year, the publication of this report is an opportunity to examine the situation of children in armed conflicts and makes it possible to shed light on their sufferings to the international community through the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council. This makes it possible to continue to consider this issue as a matter of urgency and to empower States to engage politically to resolve it.

Since the establishment of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, thousands of boys and girls have been released thanks to the implementation of action plans mandated by the Security Council to put an end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in conflicts. Admittedly, the annual United Nations reports show that tangible progress has been made in the protection of children in armed conflict, notably with the adoption of international standards for the protection of children and the implementation of strategies and programmes aimed at protecting children affected by war. However, children remain the primary victims of conflicts. Recent years have unfortunately been marked by an alarming intensification and an agonizing recurrence of conflicts, which have become increasingly complex and destructive with unprecedented violence, devastating effects and an increasingly terrifying involvement of violent extremist groups.

This has highlighted the vulnerability of tens of millions of children. Indeed, UNICEF estimates that approximately 250 million children live in countries or regions affected by armed conflicts. Over 20 million children are refugees in neighbouring countries or are internally displaced within their own country as a result of a conflict or violations of human rights. Millions of children have been seriously injured or permanently disabled. Between January and July 2015, nearly 133,000 children found refuge in some European countries — an average of 19,000 children every month — and one in four people in search of refuge is a child, according to information provided by Eurostat. Some reports state that there are 250,000 children in the world today still directly or indirectly involved in armed conflicts. The magnitude of these figures should challenge the international community and encourage it to review the international strategy for child protection.

Morocco is actively working to ensure that children's rights are effectively respected and promoted both in Morocco and worldwide. At the legislative level,

Morocco has acceded to all international instruments protecting and promoting the rights of the child. In fact, Morocco was among the first countries to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Paris commitments on this issue. Morocco has also begun the process of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child establishing a communications procedure. In addition, Morocco's legal arsenal regulates military recruitment and enrolment and acts in compliance with international law.

Morocco has become diligently engaged in international efforts to end the involvement of children in armed conflict. Similarly, Morocco has always supported the idea that the efforts of the international community to deal effectively with this problem would benefit from being part of a multifaceted approach that is at once comprehensive, through a thorough understanding of underlying and structural causes of these conflicts; strategic, dealing not only with current conflicts but also focusing on aspects of prevention; cross-cutting, involving all stakeholders; and flexible, taking into account the diverse and changing nature of armed conflicts and their particular features.

The situation of children in Yemen, mentioned in the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/360), remains a very troubling for Morocco. Indeed, the dangerous developments there, including the use of force and violence by the Houthis and the persistent efforts to torpedo the achievements of the Yemeni national dialogue, challenge us all and require a swift solution to this conflict.

Before these acts and the dangers they represent, the Kingdom of Morocco, together with other countries, has expressed its full solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its support for restoring legitimacy to Yemen and has joined the Coalition in Yemen. This Coalition was created in compliance with the rights enshrined in the United Nations Charter to protect civilians following the military escalation by the Houthis, which has undermined the peace, stability and security of Yemen.

Resolution 2216 (2015) reiterated its support for the legitimacy of the President of Yemen, Mr. Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, and asked all parties and Member States to refrain from any action likely to undermine the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen, as well as the legitimacy of the President of the country. The main objective of the Coalition is to support the political transition in Yemen, in accordance with the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and its implementation mechanism and the results of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, pursuant to all relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Morocco joins the spirit of openness and cooperation expressed by all members of the Coalition, which will continue to work closely with all stakeholders to restore peace and stability in Yemen and reach a political solution to the conflict, in accordance with all relevant resolutions of the Security Council, while ensuring the protection of all civilians, particularly children.

Finally, Morocco reiterates its willingness to work closely with all partners to develop a multifaceted approach to the protection of children in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): I would like to begin by commending Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and UNICEF for their tireless efforts on behalf of children affected by armed conflict around the world. That some 115,000 child soldiers have been released since the beginning of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General mandate is testament to their efforts and those of their colleagues in the field.

Despite these success stories, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/360) demonstrates that armed conflict continues to take an unacceptably high toll on children, so many of whom continue to be recruited and used in hostilities, killed, injured, raped, abducted and denied education and health care. This demonstrates that, 20 years on, the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is as important as ever, which is why it continues to have Australia's full support.

Against the backdrop of the highly dismaying information provided in today's briefings, I would like to focus on three issues: the need to implement action plans, the need to address attacks on health-care personnel and facilities, and the need for stronger protection of children's rights in peacekeeping operations.

First, in this, the final year of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, there is a critical need for continued efforts to implement the action plans in place with national security forces to end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The delisting of nine parties that have fully implemented their action plans demonstrates that this is an initiative that is capable of making real change. As the majority of groups listed in the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict are non-State actors, Australia welcomes the efforts taken to ensure that such groups also refrain from grave violations against children, and we encourage further efforts to that end.

Secondly, Australia is deeply concerned that medical facilities continue to come under frequent attack during conflict, in gross violation of international humanitarian law. This has serious implications for children. It is crucial that resolution 2286 (2016) is fully implemented, including its demand that all parties to armed conflict facilitate the unimpeded passage of medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties.

Thirdly, every effort should be made to ensure that those who have a mandate to protect do no harm to children. We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's commitment to banning from participating in peacekeeping missions those Government forces repeatedly listed in the annexes of the children and armed conflict reports.

The Security Council has repeatedly called for children to be shielded from the impact of conflict. Despite this, too many continue to suffer. We must do more to end grave violations against children suffered in conflicts not of their making.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Mr. Ruiz Blanco (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by thanking Malaysia for its initiative to convene today's open debate during its presidency of the Security Council and for circulating the related concept note (S/2016/662, annex). I also welcome the statement by the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, as well as the briefings by his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake.

In the 20 years since the publication of the Machel report (see A/51/306), the challenges in the protection of children in armed conflict persist, and its call to action remains in force. The Machel report was a milestone in the protection of children affected by armed conflict and outlined elements that served as paths for building regulatory frameworks and national policies. That is why Colombia hopes that today's open debate will serve as a opportunity to reiterate the commitment to the findings and recommendations of the report and to making progress in building a safer world for children.

I also want to highlight the Children, Not Soldiers campaign led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, which is aimed at achieving the commitment of States that still recruit boys and girls into their national forces to eliminating this practice. We believe that the commitment of the international community as a whole is essential in order to achieve similar results in relation to non-State groups.

Colombia rejects any kind of linkage between children and armed conflict. Since 1999, this practice has been completely banned in my country and is a crime under Colombian criminal law. In 2007, the Colombian Government established an intersectoral commission at the highest level to prevent the recruitment and use of children and adolescents in the conflict. It has been working throughout the country, using the guarantee of rights as a basic element of prevention.

In the framework of this debate, I wish to highlight the effort the country has been making over the past four years to find a negotiated settlement to the internal armed conflict, keeping the victims at the centre of the process. As a result, today we can present significant advances for the children's welfare, in particular — as many prior speakers have mentioned — through the agreement on the release of minors under 15 years of age from the camps of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejercito del Pueblo (FARC-EP) and the agreement on drafting a road map for the release of all other minors and a special comprehensive programme on their care that was introduced in May.

I also highlight the announcement of the renunciation of recruitment by the FARC-EP and the establishment of a technical committee headed by the Ombudsman — an organ independent of the branches of public power — and the presidential council for human rights with a view to facilitating the release of the children who are involved with the FARC and to ensuring the full restoration of their rights. Throughout those

efforts, we have had the support of the United Nations, particularly the Office of the Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for whose commitment we are grateful.

Colombia has a long tradition of measures to restore the rights of children who are victims of conflict, which we make available to countries in similar situations, along with all of the expertise my country has developed in this domain. From 1999 to date, more than 6,000 children have received assistance by way of the specialized programme for children demobilized from the armed groups, led by Colombia's family welfare institute. So far we have progressed in building a pathway that, taking the lessons learned from our experience, establishes the best way to re-establish the rights of children from the FARC camps and to ensure that they have access to all State services, including reparations. It is our hope that we can very soon announce the release of all of those boys and girls.

The Colombian State considers it essential that all States assume their primary responsibility in the protection of the children within their borders. From that perspective we recognize the need to durably strengthen institutional capacities. In that regard, we believe that the United Nations plays a central role, and the report of the Secretary-General is undoubtedly a fundamental tool. Council members may rest assured that Colombia will continue furthering that endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Garcia Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Malaysian delegation, through you, Sir, for the initiative in convening this open debate and for the concept note (S/2016/662, annex) circulated to inspire our interventions. We also thank the Secretary-General, Ms. Zerrougui and Mr. Lake for their briefings. We also thank the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for its work on the report of the Secretary-General and its annexes (S/2016/360).

Argentina firmly supports the work of the Security Council in preventing and putting an end to the gross violations of children's human rights in situations of armed conflict. That commitment has been demonstrated repeatedly, as we were one of the first States to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which entered into force in 2002, and supported the adoption of resolution 1261 (1999) and subsequent resolutions.

Likewise, we highlight the progress made in prevention and in the protection of the rights of children through coordinated action among the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the tasks carried out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in collaboration with UNICEF and other United Nations organs. We firmly support the need to agree on and implement measures to increase pressure on State and non-State actors who persist in committing violations and to pursue relationships with non-State actors with a view to releasing, rehabilitating and reintegrating the children associated with such groups. On that last point, we welcome the progress made during the past year in the framework of the peace accords in Colombia. Furthermore, we welcome the commitments made by various Governments in the framework of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign and call for the full implementation of the action plans in accordance with those commitments.

The protection of children under a human rights approach must remain our priority and should therefore be taken into account when defining the mandates of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, as well as in the Security Council's peacebuilding actions and the efforts to combat violent extremism. In that connection, it is essential to maintain and strengthen the capacity of peacekeeping operations to document and verify violations of the rights of children.

With respect to the ongoing occurrence of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse of children in peacekeeping missions, we cannot fail to note that the situation is serious and represents the ultimate challenge for the future of the missions and the image of the United Nations. Argentina continues to strongly support the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy in that regard and the various measures proposed in the respective reports and those contained in resolution 2272 (2016), emphasizing the central importance of prevention and protection efforts concerning victims.

We express our concern about and strongly condemn the increasing use of schools for military purposes and the increase in attacks on schools and hospitals. We believe that the issue deserves particular attention on the part of the international community in that it radically affects the right to education and health of thousands of children worldwide.

In that connection, we highlight the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) as it concerns the protection of hospitals from armed attacks. We reiterate our strong support for the Safe Schools Declaration adopted in Oslo in May 2015 and sponsored by Argentina and Norway. It commits States to implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, thereby ensuring the right to education and the protection of children and young people in conflict situations. We urgently call upon United Nations Member States, especially the members of the Security Council, to endorse the Declaration, in view of the celebration in Buenos Aires next March of the second International Conference on Safe Schools.

In conclusion, we reiterate once again the need to adopt an unequivocal approach that considers children associated with armed groups, including those associated with violent extremist groups, and children displaced by armed conflict as victims and not as perpetrators or security threats, since their recruitment, kidnapping, displacement and other causes of their alleged involvement in armed conflict or violent extremism is of a forced manner. States must endeavour to ensure the full protection of their human rights and seek alternatives to detention to ensure their effective rehabilitation and reintegration into society, based on the principles of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): The Netherlands aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and the statement to be delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The Netherlands wishes to address the following three issues in our national statement: the twentieth anniversary of the mandate, current trends, and credibility issues.

The year 2016 marks the twentieth anniversary of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Netherlands commends the current Special Representative, her predecessors and all who have helped in implementing the mandate over the past two decades. The Special Representative serves as the leading United Nations advocate for the protection and well-being of children affected by armed conflict. We can see, almost on a daily basis, the disproportionate impact of war on children in Syria, Yemen and South Sudan, to name but a few.

Too often, children are the primary victims in conflict. Therefore, the work of Ms. Zerrougui is so important to all of us. She helps the most vulnerable in the most dire circumstances. We pay tribute to her personal empathy, her efforts and her personal energy. Important gains in the implementation of the mandate of the Special Representative have been made, as she had mentioned earlier. But this year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/360) is another stark reminder that there is no room for complacency.

That brings me to my second issue. We see worrying trends: the increased number of abductions, the effects of violent extremism and the growing negative impact of forced displacement on children. Those trends show the need for further action. As rightly stated by the European Union delegation, our approach to fighting and preventing violent extremism needs to be comprehensive and should address its root causes. To prevent displacement and its negative effects on children, it is crucial that all parties to the conflict respect international humanitarian law.

In that regard, let me draw attention to the particularly distressing situation for citizens, including and especially children, in Aleppo, Syria. Let me mention the editorial opinion piece my Minister for Foreign Affairs Albert Koenders wrote in *The Independent* last weekend. The delivery of humanitarian assistance in Aleppo should be beyond dispute, regardless of whether people flee or decide to stay. The Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands therefore calls on the members of the Council to ensure agreement on the proposal of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for opening regular 48-hour humanitarian corridors.

The members of the Council should redouble their efforts to reach a diplomatic solution in Syria. Global efforts should be geared towards fighting terror and leveraging a political solution. Humanitarian access, restoration of a ceasefire and resumption of the peace talks in Geneva are first priorities. The urgency of the situation is underlined by today's reports about a horrific chlorine gas attack in Idlib province in which mostly women and children are the victims.

I come to my third subject: credibility and independence issues. For the international community to take action and to hold parties in a conflict accountable for grave violations against children, we need a strong and credible monitoring and reporting mechanism. Previous reports of the Secretary-General, including their annexes, have proven of instrumental value in that regard. But the Netherlands is concerned about a recurring trend over the past years to alter the content of the reports and to influence the listing of perpetrators. That could lead to double standards and could seriously undermine the credibility of the reports and of the United Nations. It is of the utmost importance that the integrity of the mandate on children and armed conflict be respected by all of us.

The Netherlands fully supports the independent mandate of Special Representative Zerrougui and commends her for her work. The past 20 years have shown us that under that mandate a lot can be achieved. This year's report (S/2016/360) underlines its continued relevance. We urge all Member States to guarantee its credibility and success for the coming 20 years.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands takes part in efforts for peace, justice and development, and the position and protection of children is key to all of those dimensions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Kickert (Austria): At the outset, let me thank you, Sir, and the Malaysian presidency for organizing today's debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for briefing the Council and for the prominence he attributes to protecting children in armed conflict. He has our full support in his efforts to ensure the accuracy of United Nations reporting on grave violations committed against children. We attach great importance to the independence and integrity of his Office and regret any interventions that may have been aimed at editing the content of his annual report.

Despite all setbacks and grim cases of abuse we have been reminded of today, the work of the United Nations on children and armed conflict has made substantial progress since Graça Machel's report (see A/51/306) 20 years ago. This is also thanks to the leadership, energy and perseverance of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General. Let me take the opportunity to thank Ms. Zerrougui for her admirable work.

"One has to do good in order for it to exist in the world", the nineteenth century Austrian author Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach wrote. As every child subjected to violence is potentially traumatized and thus may be a source of future violence, naturally our work for a more peaceful world has to start with our children. The issue of children and armed conflict has therefore always been a priority for Austria. As per the president's concept note (S/2016/662, annex) we want to highlight some recent activities of Austria in that respect.

In the area of reducing the impact of violent extremism on children, we engage in a multitude of prevention projects, inter alia, awareness-raising workshops for teachers and students on religious and political radicalization, jihadism, antisemitism, islamophobia and prevention strategies, but also on peace education and tolerance towards religious and ethnic diversity. Mothers' schools empower Austrian mothers with an immigration or refugee background to work against potential radicalization of their children by engaging in constructive communication and thoughtful authority in their families. In assisting children displaced by armed conflict, especially those seeking refuge, Austria is engaging in early language support groups to promote faster language-based integration resulting in positive long-term effects.

Austria is also keen to support the United Nations system in its efforts to address the plight of children affected by armed conflict. I will provide just two examples. We supported the Special Representative in hosting talks at the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution in May 2015, bringing together three major rebel groups in the Darfur conflict. The three non-State actors agreed on the need to exert more efforts to protect children and to adhere to existing international standards. We will continue our assistance to the Special Representative in that respect to advance the given commitments further. The third international conference on Children and War: Past and Present was recently held in Salzburg, co-organized by the Universities of Salzburg and Wolverhampton in association with the Office of the Special Representative, bringing together scholars, practitioners, representatives of governmental and nongovernmental institutions and the media.

We also welcome the United Nations commitment to improve training of peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel to deal comprehensively with situations involving children. We have been cooperating with the

Department of Peacekeeping Operations in developing training materials on child protection for military peacekeepers and in hosting train-the-trainer courses for troop-contributing countries. Austria will continue to offer her expertise and national infrastructure for that purpose.

In conclusion I wish to renew Austria's commitment to actively pursuing the protection of children in armed conflicts with all partners, for the good of our children and the good of our planet. Let us always keep Ebner-Eschenbach's words in our mind: "One has to do good in order for it to exist in the world". What could be more rewarding than doing good for our children.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cambodia.

Mr. Tuy (Cambodia): Allow me to express my congratulations to Malaysia for assuming the presidency of the Council during the month of August and to thank you, Sir, for organizing this highly important debate. My delegation would also like to thank the Secretary-General for preparing the annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2016/360) as well as for his tireless efforts in working to improve the situation of children worldwide. My appreciation also goes to Ms. Leila Zerrouui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their briefings on the situation on the ground relating to children in armed conflict.

While associating itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Thailand on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, I wish to speak in my national capacity as follows.

Cambodia shares the concerns expressed by fellow delegations about the difficult plight of children affected by armed conflict. Children are the hope of the future, yet time and again children fall victim to acts of violence committed by non-State armed groups. Attacks against children are on the rise, and there appears to be no safe haven for children to escape armed violence. The Secretary-General clearly outlines in his report that attacks on schools and hospitals continue unabated, and that abductions of children by terrorist organizations have increased considerably.

The international community cannot continue to tolerate the impunity of non-State armed groups and must respond swiftly and effectively. In this context, we must strengthen the existing legal instruments for the protection of children in armed conflict. At the same time, we must be careful to ensure that the international response to non-State armed groups does not cause further harm to children. We must be careful not to inadvertently contribute to children's suffering, and so must ensure that the global response is fully compliant with international law and emphasizes the protection of civilian populations, particularly women and children.

The Royal Government of Cambodia is resolved to protect children and their rights in situations of armed conflict. As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a signatory to its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict of 2000, Cambodia supports initiatives of the United Nations aimed at protecting children in conflict. Moreover, having endorsed the Paris Commitments, the Royal Government of Cambodia is committed to working with our global partners, Member States and United Nations agencies in our efforts to end the victimization of children by non-State armed groups.

Cambodia views with particular concern the observations contained within the Secretary-General's report that children, in seeking safety and peace at refugee camps, have been recruited to serve as child solders, taken sexual advantage of, abducted and otherwise victimized. This is a particularly development, which negatively affects children's psyche, contributing to their radicalization.

In this context, it is important to make children's concerns part of any peace process negotiations. Mr. President, in your concept note (see S/2016/662). you rightly point out that engaging non-State armed groups on child-protection issues may reap positive benefits, as we have seen manifested in various parts of the world. Cambodia welcomes these efforts and supports the use of such an approach in the future.

The successful reintegration of children into society is a crucial consideration in this respect. As important as it is to prevent radicalization, it is also necessary to create effective deradicalization programmes that would address the re-entry of child solders or those children affected by armed conflict into peaceful society. This would require prioritizing reintegration programmes focused on the education, health and social welfare of children.

In this context, radicalization should be addressed in schools and at home, where children are taught at an

early age about the dangers of joining, either voluntarily or by force, non-State armed groups. Moreover, migrant children should be effectively integrated within schools in their respective host nations so as to feel accepted in what is a new and foreign place to them.

Children are the hope of a better world and the driving force for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1). In this light, my delegation would like to reiterate its deeply held belief that the use of children in armed conflicts can be prevented only through the establishment of adequate social, political and economic conditions worldwide. To ensure a bright future for children and young adults, we must build inclusive societies marked by tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Buffin (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for allowing my delegation to speak in this debate. Belgium fully supports the statements made on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and should like make the following observations in its to national capacities.

We welcome the publication of the new report of the Secretary-General on the situation of children and armed conflict (S/2016/360). Among the developments noted, Belgium regrets the worsening impact of violent extremism on children. We share the view of the Secretary-General that this phenomenon is the result of a context in which it is essential to understand the root causes in order to combat it effectively. Our struggle against violent extremism will be successful only if we address its root causes, always in strict compliance with human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Gravely concerned by the phenomenon of child abductions in situations of armed conflict, my country welcomes the addition of this phenomenon to the list of violations involving inclusion in the lists annexed to the annual reports. Belgium believes that these lists are a valuable tool in the identification and prosecution of perpetrators, and contribute thereby to efforts to stop such violations.

Belgium also remains concerned about the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and calls on all parties involved in a conflict to renounce that practice, of which children are the primary victims. My country also urges States that have not yet ratified the relevant international instruments, especially the conventions banning landmines and cluster munitions, to do so as soon as possible. My country encourages all Member States to strengthen their efforts to ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

Belgium also wishes to emphasize the importance of the establishment of adequate reintegration and rehabilitation mechanisms for children affected by conflict. The extreme experiences of these children often have a negative influence on their ability to reintegrate, which can also harm term efforts to sustain peace. It is therefore important to work together to ensure that children affected by conflict can benefit from appropriate long-term support. It is in that spirit that Belgium organized last month in New York, in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Mathilde, an event promoting the sharing of best practices for the psychosocial rehabilitation and social integration of children in conflict.

Belgium reiterates its firm support for the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and notes with appreciation the results of her Children, Not Soldiers campaign, which has led all the Governments concerned to sign action plans aimed at ending the recruitment and use of children in national security forces. We strongly support the efforts made to that end in the context of peacekeeping operations, including the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in support of the capacities and initiatives of the Governments concerned to prosecute alleged recruiters of child soldiers.

In conclusion, we support the meticulous and courageous work of the personnel of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, as reflected by the fact that Belgium is one of the main donors to that UNICEF programme. We call on States Members to do the same.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to Malaysia for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict.

Indonesia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Thailand on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Ms. Leila Zerrougui and Mr. Anthony Lake for explaining the situation of and the impact of conflicts on children, as well as the implementation of several action plans to eliminate violence against children, particularly in armed conflict.

Indonesia has paid particular attention to the issue of children in armed conflict, which has a grave impact both on the involved parties and the victims, especially on the growth, well-being and future of children. We condemn any act of violence against children, as defined by the United Nations in six categories of violations against children that include the killing and maiming of children, the recruitment or use of children as soldiers, sexual violence against children, attacks on schools or hospitals, the denial of humanitarian access for children, and the abduction of children. We believe that no child imagines itself being forced to become a soldier; no child wants to be in conflict and no child wants a war. But the reality is disastrously different from our expectations.

It is already very disturbing that children are forced into armed conflict as combatants. What is equally disturbing is that they may be forced into some type of strategic position, such as spies, couriers, communications officers, logistics and other forms of involvement that can harm children. In post-war situations, the psychological condition of children involved in armed conflict has become a central concern of stakeholders that, if not carefully handled, could raise the potential for spawning radical and extremist movements in the future.

As the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306) reminds us, children who cannot escape conflict do not have the same chances for advancement enjoyed by children growing up in peace. There are short- and long-term implications that surely remain with children that have experienced first-hand the horrors of conflict and violence. In this regard, we highly value efforts that have been undertaken by the Council in establishing and implementing measures and resolutions, including the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. We also appreciate the importance of various engagements and initiatives of the Secretary-General, Member States and other stakeholders, which can provide useful guidance on the practical steps taken to ensure that children are able to grow up in a safe environment and free from any form of violence.

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1), we have a common platform to advance peace globally by arming all countries and people with economic and social equality, which will enable all of us to also exercise our abilities to protect the planet. Through this framework, leaving no one behind and achieving sustained peace for generations to come feels more tangible.

When the international community addresses conflict and violence, the greater hope is that there will be stronger strategic emphasis on prevention. First and foremost, one important measure that should be taken is to protect the minds and spirits of children from being contaminated by the violence of conflict. Moreover, one part of preventive measures is understanding the root causes and catalysts of conflicts, which are often linked to poverty, marginalization and lack of opportunities for the young population to advance themselves.

Violence against children cannot therefore be ended with silo or sporadic approaches. Purely military and security approaches have not proved effective. It is imperative for us to adopt a comprehensive approach to identifying real actions to address the impact of armed conflict on children, including through social, economic and political approaches, as well as the formulation of a long-term strategic plan for reintegration and rehabilitation. Such strategies should be based on credible and impartial information, taking into account the efforts made by Member States and in line with the responsibility and authority of States.

It is also important to create an enabling environment and implement many of the international commitments that would ensure the protection of children. Indonesia once again encourages Member States that have not yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, as well as other relevant conventions. Indonesia also encourages Member States to support efforts towards the fulfilment of the fundamental rights of children through child protection legislation, education, training and resources to ensure that the best interests of children are taken care of.

Let us once again redouble our efforts. What is at stake is the future of the world and many generations to come. Children deserve peace. Children have the right to develop healthily and enjoy a happy and harmonious life.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Mendonça e Moura (Portugal): Let me start by thanking today's briefers for their presentations. I should also like to seize this opportunity to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her briefing, and take this occasion to commend her work and efforts to ensure the protection of children in situations of ongoing armed conflict.

Portugal aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union, but let me underline some aspects of particular significance to my country.

For the past 20 years, since Graça Machel presented her study on the impact of armed conflict on children (see A/51/306), much has been done by the Council to protect children in situations of armed conflict and for the promotion and protection of human rights and international humanitarian law. Portugal is deeply committed to the promotion and protection of human rights and to international humanitarian law. In fact, the first debate held in the Council on the issue of children in armed conflict was promoted by Portugal in 1998 (see S/PV.3896). We were then already convinced, as we remain today, that this issue has serious implications for international peace and security.

Despite the significant progress achieved and the establishment of a strong normative framework and a mechanism for monitoring, reporting and responding to grave violations against children, we note that huge challenges remain, due in particular to the changing nature of conflicts, protracted conflicts, the prevalence of violent extremism and forced displacement, as the latest Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360) highlights.

The harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children and its long-term consequences for durable peace, security and development are undeniable. Because of their vulnerability, children not only suffer directly the consequences of armed conflict and of the collapse of the social fabric, but are being deliberately targeted and subject to forced recruitment, displacement, killing, sexual violence, maiming and abduction, among other appalling brutalities. This situation has been exacerbated by the action of extremist non-State armed groups and by massive forced displacements.

Portugal believes that the Council must continue to strive to find the best way to promote the protection of children affected by armed conflict and better respond to the magnitude of the challenges posed by the tremendous brutality of the acts of violence committed against them. In so doing, we need to take a certain number of points into account.

First, action plans are an important tool for engaging with armed forces and non-State armed groups and can play a positive role in ending violations against children.

Secondly, we note with growing concern the prevalence of attacks on and the use of schools and hospitals for military purposes. Governments and all other actors must protect schools and hospitals by upholding the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Thirdly, we must address the issue of impunity. While Member States have the primary responsibility in fulfilling their international commitments to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights and of international humanitarian law, the Security Council has the political and ethical role of sending a clear message that abuse against children is unacceptable and of combating, though its action, the sense of impunity among belligerents responsible for atrocities and abuses committed against children. Where national authorities fail to take the necessary steps to ensure accountability, the Security Council can, as appropriate, play a more proactive role. Portugal reiterates that the International Criminal Court (ICC) can play a fundamental deterrent role, complementary to the roles of tribunals at national and international levels, and that further institutional dialogue between the ICC and the Security Council is fundamental in that regard.

On peacekeeping operations, Portugal strongly supports the inclusion of child-protection advisers in the mandates, as well as mandatory pre-eployment training on the protection of children to ensure that the situation of children affected by armed conflict is adequately addressed in peace missions by promoting advocacy, mainstreaming, training, monitoring and reporting. We also support effective screening of peacekeepers

to ensure that individuals who have committed grave violations against children no longer serve with the United Nations.

We cannot remain indifferent to these gross violations of children's rights. We thank Malaysia for its leadership in the efforts to consolidate the mechanisms at the disposal of the Council to deal with one of the most appalling scourges of our time. Protecting children from the ravages of war is a moral imperative and an issue of international peace and security.

I would like to conclude by recalling the words of Graça Machel:

> "We need to embrace a new morality that puts children where they belong — at the heart of all agendas. Protecting children from the impact of armed conflict is everyone's responsibility — Governments, international organizations and every element of civil society."

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Panama.

Mrs. Quiel Murcia (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): Let me start by congratulating the outstanding management and leadership shown by Japan during its recent presidency of the Security Council. My delegation would also like to thank the Malaysian presidency for convening this timely debate to address an issue of great sensitivity and concern for my country given the number of children involved in and affected by armed conflict.

Panama associates itself with the statement made by the delegation of Slovenia on behalf of the Human Security Network, but would like to make several comments in our national capacity.

My delegation expresses its concern about the contents of the report of the Secretary-General, as it is indicative of the disproportionate impact that continues to make children victims of armed conflict. We are also troubled by what the Secretary-General calls

> "our collective failure to prevent ... violations [that] are directly related to the denigration of the respect for international humanitarian and human rights law" (*S/2015/360, para. 4*).

The numbers of children affected by armed conflict are increasinly alarming. They are victims of degrading and shameful acts of sexual exploitation and violence — which are made the worse when staff of the organization responsible for protecting their rights are themselves the aggressors. Children are mutilated and displaced. They perish in attacks on schools and hospitals. They are victims of abduction and recruitment in war zones. They are exposed to attacks and abuses of their human rights.

UNICEF statistics are no more encouraging. They indicate that up to 300,000 children worldwide are involved in armed forces and groups with different functions, thereby becoming the main protagonists and victims of this scourge. UNICEF also urges that the causes of conflict be addressed, as the report of the Secretary General, and he himself this morning, also do. Children have existiing rights; to ensure them we need the participation of all segments of society under co-responsibility. This imperative requires us to ensure their rights and avert threats to them, or immediately restoring their rights.

Although this would seem to be an issue that primarily affects certains regions of the world, we cannot ignore the importance of a coordinated and unified response. Otherwise, judging by the dynamics of the current population of migrants and refugees, we will all be victims of the consequences of these children affected by conflict today, who tomorrow could be maladjusted adults.

In celebrating 20 years of the agenda on children and armed conflict, we welcome and stress the resolutions and mechanisms adopted to monitor and report on grave violations of the rights of children, which have been key to raising awareness of this very serious situation and to promoting the protection of children affected, including the possibility of sanctions.

My delegation would like to highlight the work of Special Representative Zerrougi and the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, which has led to momentum on political commitments aimed at prohibiting the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. Panama attaches particular importance to the leadership of Executive Director Lake and his dedicated work on behalf of the neediest children. By way of encouragement, we also commend the work of Colombia to favour efforts aimed at protecting children in the course of its peace process.

Panama reiterates its commitment to international efforts to ensure full protection for children's rights in all areas, and in particular when it comes to the scourge of armed conflict and the challenges posed by

violent extremism.My country is prepared to cooperate actively with intenrational initiatives, programmes and prevention mechanisms whose main goal is to ensure the welfare and protection of children. We therefore welcome the call made this morning by the Secretary-General that the Council and its member States make every effort to back up his words with actions that protect children from the scourge of conflicts. Twenty-five years after Panama's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we reiterate our determination to work together to join efforts in defence of the principle of guaranteeing the best interests of children under any circumstances.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka): My delegation would like to extend warm congratulations to Malaysia's presidency of the Security Council for the month of August and to commend the President for convening this most important debate on children in armed conflict. We attach particular significance to the fact that Malaysia is the current Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We also take note of the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougi.

Given the horrendous threat to posed to international peace and security by terrorism and violent extremism, we welcome the particular emphasis at this debate on the two thematic areas, namely, reducing the impact of violent extremism on children, and children displaced in conflict.

More than 65 million people have fled their homes due to conflict and violence, and about half of those affected are children. As Member States, we must make it our responsibility to protect those children forcibly displaced and to ensure their access to health and education.

Sri Lanka commends the efforts of the Secretary-General on his annual report (S/2016/360) on children and armed conflict covering the year 2015. We also welcome the briefing he gave this moring.

We continue to hear the same horrifying tale of the increasing impact of terrorism and violent extremism on children from Yemen to Nigeria to Syria, and from Afghanistan to Somalia to South Sudan. We note with great concern that children are the most significantly affected by violent extremism and too often are the direct targets of acts intended to cause the maximum civilian casualties and terrorize communities. Attacks on schools and hospitals were starkly prevalent this past year, and documented in 19 out of 20 situations of conflict. The increasing use of air strikes and explosive weapons in populated areas has had a devastating impact on schools and hospitals.

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the Paris Principles — which are principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups — it is imperative that we as Member States respond to violent extremism with a multi-pronged approach that also addresses the root causes of poverty, marginalization and disaffection that lead to the killing, maiming, or forcible displacement and/or radicalization of children. The Secretary-General has raised concerns that current operations include the systematic treatment of children as security threats as opposed to victims, including the detention of children solely based on their alleged association with armed groups or forces. It is important that children not be detained unless they are charged with recognizable offences, and then only in accordance with juvenile justice standards and rules of international law.

Sri Lanka has emerged from a nearly 30-year violent conflict, which tore at the very fabric of our nation. During that time, Sri Lanka witnessed the unbearable horror of child soldiers, who were used as combatants by non-State armed groups. Those innocent victims were called the "baby brigade". Forty per cent of those children were girls. Many of them were taken forcibly from their villages or schools to serve as combatants or in support roles, such as cooks, and porters, among others. In the fog of war, many became the victims of conflict.

When the armed conflict ended, in May 2009, a total of 594 child combatants between 12 and 18 years of age surrendered. Sri Lanka considered those children victims of the conflict and took measures to rehabilitate and reintegrate the former child combatants by providing education, recreational facilities and vocational training, as well as psychological support to help them deal with their past. The strategies and activities included improving the physical and mental state by spiritual, psychosocial, personality and leadership training, followed by vocational and technical training in order to give them the best possible chance in life to become productive citizens.

It was important to rebuild their trust in those who were meant to protect them, their trust in society and their faith even in themselves. Those positive developments undertaken by Sri Lanka led the United Nations to delist Sri Lanka from annex 2 of the report of the Secretary-General on child combatants in 2012. Since January 2015, with positive changes in its Administration, Sri Lanka has been able to go further in its endeavours to chart a path of true reconciliation and justice.

Our national initiatives and programme on rehabilitating and reintegrating former child combatants have been some of the most successful projects of that nature in recent history. However, demobilizing children from the ranks of non-State armed groups and their subsequent rehabilitation and reintegration into society are riddled with complications. There is no one-size-fits-all formula to address this issue. But in all our actions, compassion, kindness and understanding must serve as the common thread. Sri Lanka believes that there are three effective methods to reduce the recruitment of child combatants: first, political and economic pressure on the offending party; secondly, mobilizing resources for rehabilitation programmes; and, thirdly, addressing the socioeconomic, political and ideological dynamics that seduce children into groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh.

But there is more to be done. There must be an accurate and credible listing of perpetrators of the six grave violations against children identified by the Secretary-General. We need to strengthen monitoring, reporting and response to child rights violations on the ground; implement existing United Nations action plans with armed forces and groups listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict; and unanimously call for stronger protection of children's rights within United Nations peacekeeping operations. As we all know, children are the first and most vulnerable casualties of war. It is children who are exploited by non-State armed groups. It is children who are in the cross hairs. And impressionable as they are, children, at a young age, will watch, learn and shape our future on the basis of our actions. It is in the hands of those of us who make decisions not only to set the right example, but to do everything in our power so that our children are armed with books, not guns, and that they play in sand boxes rather than hide behind sand bags.

Finally, Sri Lanka wishes to thank United Nations agencies, in particular UNICEF and its dynamic Executive Director, Mr. Anthony Lake, as well as our bilateral partners for their assistance and support as we addressed the challenges and issues of child combatants during Sri Lanka's armed conflict. Sri Lanka stands steadfast in its support of the children of the world and stands ready to work with other Member States, particularly through sharing our experiences.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the observer State of Palestine.

Ms. Rasheed (Palestine): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency this month and thank you for convening this important debate on children and armed conflict. This matter continues to be of the highest priority and urgency for the State of Palestine. I would also like to join others in thanking Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui and UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake for their briefings this morning.

Without any doubt, the call to action made in Graça Machel's 1996 report (see A/51/306) and the efforts made thereafter by the international community have contributed to notable successes and achievements in the areas of children's rights and the protection of children affected by armed conflict. However, today, as validated by the speakers in this debate, the world faces new and grave challenges in connection with the protection of children affected by armed conflict. As such, the devastating impact and the long-lasting consequences for millions of children must warrant an immediate and serious response by the international communit — or rather, a renewed call to action — in order to overcome the unprecedented and persisting challenges facing children.

The report (S/2016/360) of the Secretary-General before us today directly links the increased intensity of grave violations in a number of situations of armed conflict to the denigration of respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. We could not agree more with his assessment. For nearly half a century, the Palestinian people and their children living under Israeli occupation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, have endured appalling levels of human suffering as their rights have been violently denied and international humanitarian

law has continued to be trampled on by Israel, the occupying Power.

Unprotected, despite the very clear provisions of international law according protection to civilians under foreign occupation, Palestinian children continue to be killed, injured and terrorized by the occupying Power with complete impunity. The Secretary-General's report clearly reflects that. In fact, not only did violations by Israel against Palestinian children continue, but since October 2015 they have intensified as the occupying forces have unleashed a new wave of aggression, provocation and incitement against the entire Palestinian civilian population, including children. Tragically, since then, more than 40 Palestinian children have been killed, many of whom in extrajudicial executions.

As noted by the report and verified by many international human rights organizations, Israeli occupying forces resorted to the excessive use of force and unlawful killings despite the fact that there were no indications that the children killed posed an imminent or immediate threat to Israeli occupying forces. In addition to the killing of those children, we would also like to share that, since October 2015, more than 2,600 children have also been injured, many severely, owing to Israel's use of live ammunition against unarmed and defenceless Palestinian children.

The report before us also notes an increased number of Palestinian children who were arrested and detained by Israeli occupying forces during the reporting period, including many who are currently being held under administrative detention. In occupied East Jerusalem alone, 860 Palestinian children were arrested, including 136 between 7 and 11 years of age, under the age of criminal responsibility. It must be recalled that most, if not all, children held in Israeli prisons or detention centres are subjected to various forms of psychological and physical torture.

Moreover, settler violence and terror against Palestinians, including children, under the protection and watch of the Israeli occupying forces, continue unabated. The report notes that there were at least 20 cases of settler attacks that resulted in injury to Palestinian children. This includes the terrorist attack on 31 July 2015, when settler terrorists burned the Dawabshe family home in the occupied West Bank village of Duma, killing 18-month-old baby Ali and fatally injuring his parents. Ali's 4-year-old brother Ahmad, who suffered severe burns, is the only survivor and was only released from the hospital to a rehabilitation facility just last week.

Besides those violations, Israel, the occupying Power, continues with its systematic collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, which has gravely affected our children. One example of that is the occupying Power's continued unlawful practice of punitive home demolitions, which have rendered hundreds of children and their families homeless. The report also notes that attacks on schools and protected personnel, and a pervasive environment of violence, harassment and intimidation by the occupying Power, continued to have an impact on Palestinian children's access to education. Attacks by the occupying Power on hospitals in the occupied State of Palestine also continued, despite the fact that hospitals, as well as schools, are afforded special protection under international humanitarian law.

Palestinian children in the occupied Gaza Strip also continue to be victims of persistent violations of international law at the hands of the occupying Power. Children who managed to escape death or physical injury during the three wars on Gaza over a six-year span live with psychological effects that are severe and resounding. Many have lost one or two parents, and some have even lost their entire extended families. Moreover, more than 44,000 Palestinian children are still displaced as a result of their homes being destroyed by the occupying Power in its 2014 war on Gaza, in which grave violations, including war crimes, were committed before the eyes of the international community, without consequences for the occupying Power or justice served for the Palestinian people.

In addition, the 10-year illegal Israeli blockade — a repugnant form of collective punishment amounting to a war crime and the source of countless human rights violations — has persisted, deepening poverty, food insecurity, health problems and many other social and economic ills among children, including the fact that for the first time in five decades the infant mortality rate in Gaza has risen, as hospitals continue to lack adequate infrastructure, basic drugs and supplies due to Israeli restrictions.

All of these violations must cease and Israel must be compelled to respect international law, for these crimes committed against our children are intolerable

and unacceptable. We reiterate that the Palestinian people and their children cannot remain the exception to the responsibility to protect civilians from atrocities and flagrant breaches of the law, for they are not just statistics but human beings whose lives are being constantly shattered by a brutal occupier that proves over and over again its total disregard for the lives and rights of Palestinian children.

Therefore, we call on the international community, including the Security Council, to uphold its responsibilities and provide the necessary assistance and protection to Palestinian children and hold accountable the violators of international law, especially those laws meant to protect children's rights. Palestinian children deserve more than a life marked by the daily fear and humiliation that comes with living under occupation. They deserve to live in freedom, peace, dignity and security, which can be realized only when they are free from occupation and living in their own independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I congratulate Malaysia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

We recognize the critical importance of this debate and honour the twentieth anniversary of the children and armed conflict report. We are participating in today's debate because of our long-standing dedication to children in need worldwide. Nowhere is securing children in conflict more urgent than in our region, where the abuses against children are especially heart-wrenching, as we have heard throughout the day and in the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's briefing. In Syria, children have now been out of school for six years, while thousands have been killed. In the occupied Palestinian territories, generations of children have been deprived of basic fundamental freedoms for decades. Da'esh and other terrorist groups' widespread recruitment and use of children as tools of war is equally abhorrent and must be ended.

The subject of Yemen has also been raised in today's debate, and I will focus my remarks on that topic given the United Arab Emirates's involvement in the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen, formed at the request of President Hadi. To date, 79 Emiratis have paid the ultimate price in service of Yemen. In the light of that sacrifice, the United Arab Emirates and all the members of the Coalition take extraordinary measures to protect children's rights anywhere we are engaged. The United Arab Emirates regrets the initial listing of the Coalition in the annex of the 2015 report (S/2016/360), but appreciates the Secretary-General's decision to remove the Coalition from the annex and to engage in a forward-looking review to protect the integrity of the report and strengthen its mechanisms. As committed, accountable members of the international community, the Coalition is currently investigating all allegations, and findings will be submitted to the United Nations in a responsible and transparent manner. Based on our experience, we offer some procedural and substantive suggestions to strengthen the impact of future reports in the shared interest of protecting children in conflict zones. Specifically, we advocate the adoption of the following policies.

First, consulting regularly with national Governments — as mandated in guidelines set forth in resolution 1612 (2005) — is key to ensuring that the information on which the report is based is accurate and verified, with Member States and the United Nations working together in good faith.

Secondly, with regard to reconsidering the utility of the annex list, and specifically the listing of responsible Member States alongside non-State actors and terrorist groups, the annex must be connected to specific outcomes to protect children. In that regard, the listing of a coalition of countries is problematic legally and practically, and should not become a practice.

Thirdly, we should establish clear and transparent mechanisms for measuring criteria within the report in a systematic, equitable manner that is apparent to all.

We do not bear the risk of engagement in any military theatre lightly, and we continue to strive to minimize the impact of operations on civilians. We have therefore engaged directly with the Secretary-General and the Special Representative, and have communicated details of the Coalition's rules of engagement, which are in full compliance with international law, as well as the review mechanisms, preventive systems and corrective measures in place. Furthermore, the United Arab Emirates and its Coalition partners welcome further communication through a joint review to exchange information and lessons learned. Moreover, we reiterate the Coalition's invitation to the United Nations team of

experts to visit its headquarters in Riyadh to further engage in the review process.

Allow me to remind those here in the Chamber that the Coalition itself was created to protect civilians — including children — from Houthi rebels and externally backed and other extremist groups. At the request of the legitimate Yemeni Government, the Coalition's aims were to protect the welfare of the Yemeni people; provide regional stability and security by reinstating the legitimate Governments; and, in parallel, halting the expansion of extremist groups, including Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and Da'esh. However, we all know that durable solutions for stability are not gained through military actions alone. That is why the United Arab Emirates and its international partners are building long-term institutional capacity in Yemen by developing the country's Government, social support infrastructure, rule of law and economy.

Furthermore, we continue to address the urgent humanitarian need on the ground by providing and facilitating the delivery of aid. United Arab Emirates contributions have totalled $900 million since operations started in March 2014.

Ultimately, the United Arab Emirates and all members of the coalition are strongly committed to intra-Yemeni negotiations as part of the ongoing peace process. The United Arab Emirates fully supports the efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen to bring the parties to a political resolution of this conflict.

In closing, let me note the United Arab Emirates' deep appreciation for the work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and of other relevant United Nations agencies, particularly UNICEF, with which we have a strong, global partnership, to protect children around the world. For us and other responsible members of the international community, we are not engaging in any discussion to protect our image. The mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict is a just and universal one for which the United Arab Emirates offers its full support.

The President: I now call on the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Nkoloi (Botswana): We wish at the outset to congratulate Malaysia on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of August. We also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning and his report (S/2016/360), as well as the representative of UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Botswana reaffirms the importance it attaches to the protection and promotion of the rights of children, including in the context of armed conflict. The international community therefore has a moral obligation to collectively pay attention to children's welfare, without any distinction.

We strongly support all efforts aimed at preventing violations against children during armed conflict in all their manifestations, including the mandate and the work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

My delegation welcomes efforts such as the Children, Not Soldiers campaign; the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict; and the Safe Schools Declaration. We believe that these are timely initiatives that will go a long way towards complementing ongoing efforts to end the use of children in armed conflict and protecting facilities such as schools and hospitals.

The nature and character of conflict has involved over time, increasingly targeting innocent civilians and subjecting them to unspeakable acts of horror, exploitation and abuse. The rise in the number of non-State actors involved in conflict further complicates this already complex situation.

The threat to international peace and security posed by these developments, particularly the internationalization of these conflicts, requires urgent and decisive action by the Council. Chief among its objectives as it does so must be to ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of children everywhere, including in armed conflict, and to enable them to study in an environment of safety and security.

Botswana is deeply concerned about the gravity of these evolving violations against children, including abductions, which have begun to occur at a startling rate. The Secretary-General's report shows that whereas in the past the mass abduction of civilians, including children in armed-conflict situations, was

largely a means to an end, today they are an end unto themselves, with the prime objective of inflicting terror and horror.

We note with sadness the numerous executions and incidents involving the maiming of children that have been clearly captured in the report. This matter has been reported over time, and it is our sincere hope that the perpetrators of such acts will one day be called to account.

We must guarantee the full protection of the rights of children so as to enable them to attend school without interruption, enjoy access to all social services that contribute to their development, good health and well-being, so that they can realize their full potential.

Botswana firmly believes that States have the primary responsibility to protect their own populations from all manner of abuse. This includes the protection of children from the risk of war. In this regard, we wish to stress the urgency and importance of enhancing political will and the commitment to prevent and address the tragic plight of children in armed conflict.

We encourage focus on national ownership and responsibility; engagement with the Governments and armed groups concerned, aimed at establishing frameworks for accountability; and the systematic monitoring of such commitments, for these are of the utmost priority to us.

We therefore call on the Security Council to continue its efforts to fight impunity and enforce accountability, including the adoption of targeted measures against persistent perpetrators of violations against children. Where violations are committed and verified, they must be referred to the International Criminal Court, which must, without exception, put an end to impunity and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Botswana believes that the strengthening of global efforts to end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict should be consistent with and complementary to wider efforts to promote and implement Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict.

As we continue to seek solutions for international peace and security, our strategies must be guided by the desire for lasting and sustainable peace. We should address the root causes of conflict, such as social exclusion, economic inequality, gender discrimination and ethnic tension, to mention but a few. In this regard, we welcome the significant efforts made by several States in implementing Council resolutions, including resolution 1612 (2005), 1998 (2011), 2068 (2012), 2143 (2014) and 2286 (2016), and we believe that these should continue to be vigorously pursued.

We share the view that such efforts should be supported in order to strengthen national capacities for child protection, investigative and prosecutorial capacities and accountability mechanisms, and the establishment of age-verification processes for military recruitment must be ensured.

Finally, Botswana reaffirms its commitment to fulfilling its obligations under international law and under all other international instruments to which it is a party. Botswana regards it as fundamentally clear that in some of the States where major conflicts and crises rage, the authorities have manifestly failed in their responsibility to protect civilians. In this respect, we believe that where States are unwilling or unable to protect their populations, the international community must step in to safeguard human rights.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mrs. Natividad (Philippines): The Philippines associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Thailand on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

We wish to extend our gratitude to the Malaysian presidency for once again placing the issue of children and armed conflict at the top of the agenda, especially at a time when conflicts around the world continue unabated, affecting children and other vulnerable groups the most. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/360) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as UNICEF, for their presentations.

The Philippines strongly believes that to provide the greatest protection for our children, we have to continue our work towards ending conflict and creating an environment that is conducive for them to grow and learn unimpeded.

It is for this reason that the Philippine Government, under a new Administration, is committed to starting dialogue and ultimately forging peace pacts with various armed groups.

It remains steadfast in passing the Bangsamoro Basic Law, based on the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, signed with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front on 27 March 2014.

Last month, a comprehensive peace road map was approved by the President that aims to bring peace and development by addressing the issue of the Bangsamoro and the resumption of peace talks with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front. Our Congress will have to pass a law to implement this peace road map.

The Philippines remains committed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international humanitarian law. The Council for the Welfare of Children continues its work in implementing the monitoring, response and reporting system for grave violations of child rights. Local government units participated in a series of orientation workshops on the concept of the protocol of the MRRS so that they can proactively monitor, report and respond to incidents of grave child rights violations. The Council for the Welfare of Children established a monitoring, response and reporting hotline in April, which will be specific to receiving calls related to grave child rights violations in situations of armed conflict to provide an immediate response to the victims.

The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, meanwhile, has developed and mainstreamed the conflict-sensitive peace-promoting manual, which serves as a guide for national Government agencies and local government units in ensuring the adoption of a peace lens in their crafting of policies and in the implementation of programmes and projects on the ground, including for children in armed conflict.

For its part, the Department of National Defence issued a circular in February that prescribed policies and procedures to protect children from harm during armed conflict and to prevent the commission of grave child rights violations by both State and non-State actors during armed conflict. A bill for special protection for children in situations of armed conflict and another one to establish permanent evacuation centres in local government units are awaiting passage in the Philippine Congress. Both bills will ensure the continuity of education during and after an armed encounter.

The Philippines notes the incidents cited in the Secretary-General's report of violations of children's rights in indigenous communities. We remain committed to addressing these concerns and bringing perpetrators to justice. Our armed forces will also continue to work with the United Nations on the strategic plan to prevent and respond to grave child rights violations in situations of armed conflicts.

Apart from our national efforts, I wish to end by reiterating the Philippines' commitment to working with our international partners to ensure the utmost protection for our children as we strive to resolve conflicts and achieve lasting peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on Malaysia's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August and to thank Malaysia for taking the initiative to organize this debate on the plight of children in armed conflict. I would like to commend Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and tell her how much we value her commitment and dedication to children's causes throughout the world. Finally, I extend my thanks to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake and all those who took the floor before me for their very enlightening statements.

Before I proceed, I would like to make some comments on the part of the report (S/2016/360) presented to the Council that concerns my country.

The report provides some statistics on the situation of child soldiers in my country. It is important to remind the Council, as we have always stressed, that today there are no longer child soldiers in the Congolese national army. The children that our army hands over to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) come from armed groups.

Going back to the statistics to which we alluded, we would like to draw the Council's attention to the fact that, as the joint technical working group has stated every time, these statistics are problematic to the extent that the statistics presented by MONUSCO are not necessarily in line with those of UNICEF and of the European Union's national programme for disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR),

which are all evolving structures within the technical working group. During the discussions in the technical working group, these structures have always insisted that only the statistics validated by the European Union's national DDR programme should be taken into account. In this context, it seems useful to inform the Council briefly on the following points.

The situation of the 10 children found in the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), as mentioned in paragraph 46 of the report, had been the subject of an investigation ordered by the National Ministry of Defence to the Chief of Staff of our army who in turn issued the order to the Commander of the 32nd Military Region. The latter, after verifying the facts, brought Colonels Ramazani and Kamulete, the alleged perpetrators, to justice.

With regard to the situation of the 22 children found in the Angenga prison, they were captured by the FARDC during military operations against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, to which they belonged. After they had been identified and there had been an exchange about them with the International Committee of the Red Cross, they were immediately handed over to UNICEF Goma. It should be noted that five of these children, at a much earlier date, had been declared adults by child protection agencies in Goma.

The case of the 29 children allegedly killed or maimed by the FARDC and 9 by the police is noted in paragraph 47 of the report. MONUSCO did not bring this case to the attention of the joint technical working group, which is the appropriate context to exchange information and to harmonize the views of each party. The FARDC and the Congolese national police do not acknowledge these facts, unless they happened without their knowledge during the fighting against the armed groups.

Finally, the use of schools for military purposes is mentioned in paragraph 50 of the report. This practice is not tolerated within the FARDC, especially since a directive of the Ministry of Defence has prohibited it for several years. It should be noted that the troops in all units of our army now receive training in international humanitarian law. Moreover, since the Government and the United Nations signed the action plan, awareness-raising campaigns have been conducted and the contents of the plan are on the curriculum of all the military academies in our country. In order to demonstrate our determination never to use schools for military purposes, my country endorsed the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration.

Having provided these explanations, I would like to say that the issue of child soldiers is of concern to my Government, which, under the leadership of the Head of State, has decided to ban the recruitment and use of children in our armed forces and our security services. To translate this political resolve into action, the Head of State has set up a structure to combat sexual violence and the recruitment and use of children. The senior State official responsible for managing this structure works closely with authorities in the military, judiciary and the Ministry for Gender, Women and Children.

Among the actions taken by the Government in the context of this struggle I can cite the following. There is an operation to identify military staff by setting up a biometric database to manage soldiers' personal data, especially their age. An action plan has been signed with the United Nations comprising a series of commitments to put an end to the recruitment and use of children by the army and to sexual violence against children. Every six months the situation is assessed, in collaboration with various partners, to take stock of the progress achieved.

Two important directives have been signed by the Minister of National Defence and the Deputy Head of the National Intelligence Agency. The first is for the armed forces and instructs the commanders of military training centres to facilitate access to military barracks by the United Nations child protection country teams, as well as by child protection agencies for verification purposes. This directive empowers the military hierarchy to punish with disciplinary action and to bring to justice any soldier under their command who is guilty of committing serious violations of children's rights. The directive also requires that awareness campaigns and training be held in all military garrisons of the country in order to allow all military personnel to become familiar with the action plan and the obligations flowing therefrom.

Under the second directive, which applies to the intelligence services, members of the United Nations response team and child protection agencies are permitted to work unhindered by and with transparency from the intelligence services. This directive also authorizes the release of any child linked to armed groups and his or her transfer to a child-protection

agency. In addition, we have created two coordination bodies to monitor the implementation of the action plan.

With respect to the fight against impunity, high-ranking officers of the army and police who have been found guilty of violations against children's rights have been sentenced.

We have opened new courts whose mandate is to punish serious crimes committed against children, and the Government has taken a decision not to allow any person found guilty of six or more serious violations of children's rights in time of conflict to remain in the army.

With the financial support of UNICEF and working in partnership with MONUSCO, the Department of National Defence held a workshop in Kinshasa from 24 to 25 August 2015 to draft a road map of priorities to fight the recruitment of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The workshop brought together people from the FARDC, the national police and civil society from all of the provinces of the country. A joint technical working group has been set up in areas affected by armed conflict, namely, North Kivu, South Kivu and Orientale provinces.

In addition, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as the report of the Secretary-General highlights, continues to carry out the United Nations Children, Not Soldiers campaign, launched by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF. My country has also taken the initiative of implementing the objectives of the campaign as they are defined in resolution 2143 (2014).

Undeniable progress has been made in my country's fight against the recruitment and use of children within the army and intelligence services. As part of this fight, 46,087 children linked with the armed forces and armed groups have been demobilized. Of these children, approximately 15,365 have been accepted for formal education and are now attending 208 schools. The other 30,722 are being given vocational training within 417 professional apprenticeship structures.

Despite these successes, however, much work remains to be done. As long as armed groups remain active, this situation will persist. That is why my Government remains determined to continue its efforts to completely neutralize armed groups and thereby put an end to this phenomenon.

I would be remiss if I did not express the gratitude of my country to the United Nations and our numerous international partners that have always supported our efforts in combating the recruitment and use of children. In particular, my country would like to thank Japan and UNICEF for providing significant financial support, without which it would have been difficult to obtain the results we have achieved today.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada): I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, an informal network of 40 interested Member States that represents all five regional groups at the United Nations.

The Group of Friends wishes to reiterate its very strong support for the Children and Armed Conflict agenda, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and the United Nations institutions working to promote the rights of children in armed conflict worldwide.

On this twentieth anniversary of the creation of this mandate by the General Assembly, we welcome the evolution of a stronger normative and institutional framework on the issue of children and armed conflit. Today we have robust norms against the recruitment and use of children and armed conflict, as well as a growing range of tools to monitor and address all grave violations against children.

A key element of the success of the children and armed conflict agenda has been the monitoring and reporting mechanism established under landmark resolution 1612 (2005). The mechanism is designed to document grave violations against children, strengthen accountability and ensure compliance with international legal standards in cooperation with national Governments. It is important that the mechanism be able to document the existence of grave violations against children impartially and objectively, based on facts on the ground. Therefore, the United Nations must deploy appropriate resources to implement its children and armed conflict mandate and the mechanism. In that regard, the Group of Friends calls for the maintenance of dedicated resources, leadership and expertise in order to support the child-protection work of United Nations peace operations and the respective agencies that are part of the mechanism.

The Group of Friends welcomes the signing of action plans by all eight countries whose Government forces have been listed by the Secretary-General as having recruited and used children in armed conflict, including, most recently, the Sudan. We also commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's efforts through the Children, Not Soldiers campaign. We urge the full and timely implementation of action plans by Governments and non-State actors alike to halt and prevent violations against children.

Despite these successes, the Group of Friends deplores the increase in the intensity of grave violations against children recorded in several situations of conflict in 2015. In particular, we are deeply concerned about the rise of armed groups employing extreme violence and their recruitment and use of children. The impact on children will be felt for generations to come. We must better consider how to prevent the radicalization and recruitment of children, how to separate children from such groups and reintegrate them into their societies and how to deal with the survivors' long-term psychological and social implications. Throughout this process, we must not lose sight of the fact that these children should be treated as victims, not perpetrators. Moreover, the prevalence of attacks on and the use of schools and hospitals for military purposes remains deeply worrying. The Group of Friends calls on all parties to protect schools and hospitals by upholding the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The Group of Friends expresses its profound concern with regard to the impact of the unprecedented wave of forced displacement on children. We encourage Governments to take urgent action to respect the rights of children forcibly displaced as a result of conflict and to ensure, in cooperation with the international community, their protection, access to health and education and dignified livelihoods for their families. Moreover, today's armed conflicts are resulting in new physical and psychological disabilities among children, which can make them become even more vulnerable and face a higher risk of becoming victims of violence, discrimination, abuse and neglect, which requires a concerted response.

Lastly, the Group of Friends condemns in the strongest terms ongoing incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse against children, especially if they are committed by United Nations forces and staff. We call on the international community to redouble its efforts to combat this scourge and welcome recent efforts undertaken by the United Nations and its States Member to prevent these grave violations and to provide support to victims.

(*spoke in French*)

I would now like to make an additional five points in my capacity as the representative of Canada.

First is a statement of fact. We are especially horrified by the emergence of armed groups that employ extreme violence and recruitment and use children.

Second, we call on Member States to be steadfast in their support for the children and armed conflict agenda implemented by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Zerrougui. Ms. Zerrougui has been a tireless and effective champion. She needs our political and financial support.

Thirdly, as we have heard many times today, children represent over half of the 60 million displaced persons worldwide, and over half of the 23 million refugees. If we wish to help these children, one of the simplest ways to do so is to offer them a welcoming land as soon as possible. That is why Canada is so proud to have resettled nearly 30,000 Syrian refugees over the past year. It is also why we feel obligated to welcome even more. The Obama Summit in September will be an excellent opportunity for countries to come forward with commitments to welcoming more refugees and thereby help a greater number of children.

Fourthly, the United Nations must do more in its peace operations to help children in situations of armed conflict. The United Nations must redouble its efforts to address the scourge of the sexual exploitation and abuse of children. In that regard, we support the Secretary-General's commitment to prohibiting Government armed forces listed in the annexes to his reports on children and armed conflict from contributing troops to peacekeeping operations.

(*spoke in English*)

Fifthly, Member States should strengthen their promotion of the children and armed conflict agenda. Building on the success of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in New York, Canada is supporting the establishment of local branches of the Group of Friends in Afghanistan, the Philippines, the Sudan and Geneva. It is our hope that such groups

will raise awareness, exchange views and coordinate assistance on children and armed conflict issues at the national and regional levels.

In sum, much work needs to be done. Yet, it is not enough to deplore the abuses being committed. It is incumbent upon all Member States to do what they can to support children in armed conflict, both at home and abroad. Canada stands ready to play its part in support of this vital cause.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Greece.

Mrs. Boura (Greece): I would like to congratulate the Malaysian presidency of the Security Council on the initiative to convene this open debate on children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for their interest and commitment, as well as for their very thorough briefings on the issue.

Greece aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. In my national capacity, I would like to add the following.

Greece attaches great importance to the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. In recent years, we have witnessed increasing challenges in this field. Indeed, in protracted conflicts, humanitarian crises, forced displacement and violent extremism, children are directly affected and, in many instances, have become targeted victims. The latest report submitted by the Secretary-General (S/2016/306) is crucial in laying out these challenges. We attach major importance to the impartiality of the report and fully support the call of the Secretary-General on all parties to work closely with the Special Representative.

However, much more needs to be done to further strengthen international efforts aimed at the protection of children in armed conflicts. It is imperative to ensure that children are able to grow up in a safe environment, free from exploitation and any form of abuse and violence. Having ratified the relevant international normative framework for the protection of children, Greece strongly encourages all States to sign, ratify and fully implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its first Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts. In Greece, since 2011 the recruitment of children in armed conflicts has constituted a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and is punishable as such by the national judicial system.

Greece was among the first endorsing States of the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration of May 2015, which calls upon parties to armed conflict to avoid using educational buildings for military purposes or making them targets of attack. We believe that the Safe Schools Declaration provides a concrete way for countries to commit to protecting children's education even during armed conflict.

The competent Greek authorities are currently elaborating an action plan on the rights of the child that sets as a priority the protection of children in refugee crises. My country, deeply affected by unprecedented refugee flows, spares no effort to provide assistance and protect the rights of children fleeing armed conflicts. It is our utmost priority to save thousands of children's lives in search-and-rescue operations at sea and to receive them in a humane way. In 2015 alone, more than 150,000 people, including thousands of children, were rescued by the Hellenic Coast Guard in about 2,500 operations at sea.

In concluding, I would like to reiterate that Greece remains committed to effectively ensuring respect for and protection of the fundamental rights of children as a crucial guarantee for the future of our societies. In that regard, my country fully subscribes to the call to intensify international and regional efforts to strengthen cooperation in putting an end to grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict around the world.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to thank and commend Malaysia for convening this important meeting to address the issue of children and armed conflict.

I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report of 20 April (S/2016/306). We further thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, for their informative briefings to the Council and for their references to the joint efforts of the Sudan and the United Nations to protect children in conflict zones in the Sudan.

We should like to provide the Security Council with clarifications concerning a number of paragraphs of the Secretary-General's report.

First, paragraph 135 refers to documented cases of rape by Sudanese Armed Forces elements and aligned militias. We note in that regard that the relevant Sudanese civil and military law imposes maximum penalties for proven violations. Cases are referred to the judicial authorities, where they are speedily investigated regardless of the position of the accused. It is also worth noting that the Independent Expert, Mr. Aristide Nononsi, issued a report on the humanitarian situation in the Sudan, covering the period from October 2015 to June 2016, that points to a decrease in cases of rape to the lowest level recorded in any conflict zone. That is testimony from an official who is authorized to conduct monitoring and surveillance in my country.

Secondly, paragraph 136 notes that two schools and three hospitals were attacked by the Sudanese Armed Forces without specifying the names of the hospitals, despite the fact that in Darfur, like elsewhere in the Sudan and throughout the world, hospitals are clearly marked and known. Nor does the report mention the date of the attack or the number of casualties. Also, the report does not cite the source for its information or whether it is a United Nations source or a source of the opposition forces or of the 22,740 non-governmental organizations that operate in the conflict zone. We note with satisfaction the increased interest among United Nations States Members to cite the sources of information in full transparency and clarity. In that regard, I would like to refer to the statements made by the representatives of Egypt, the Russian Federation, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other States at this crucial meeting on an important issue.

Paragraph 140 of the report refers to the recruitment of four boys by the Sudanese Armed Forces in West Darfur. I should like to clarify the following.

First, since the establishment of the Sudan Defence Forces before the Second World War — even before independence — our country had in place laws and regulations banning the recruitment of children under the age of 18. The recruitment form, knows as Form 5-A, includes a paragraph stipulating the age of the applicant and requesting the submission of a birth certificate or an age estimation certificate as further proof to confirm the information. The recruitment procedures for our Rapid Support Forces are based on the merits of each individual case. Similarly, we require birth certificates or age estimation certificates. Applicants also undergo medical exams, which makes us confident that there are no minor children in the ranks of the Rapid Support Forces.

Secondly, the reports claims in paragraph 140 have not been verified. We therefore wonder why unverified information is included in the report. Furthermore, children captured in the battles of Goz Dongo and Fanga were conscripts in the armed movements. They are still in the ranks of the armed movements and are being used by them. The Government has dealt with those children in accordance with national and international humanitarian law. We have provided them with the necessary humanitarian and psychological support. And we have developed a plan for their reintegration and rehabilitation. We would like to reiterate that we have taken steps on the ground and at the highest levels to release the detained children. We will soon provide the Council information on the steps taken. I would like to thank Special Represenative of the Secretary-General Zerrougi for her full cooperation, which produced excellent results.

Paragraph 145 of the report states that the leaders of the Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi and the Sudan Liberation/Abdul Wahid issued a join statement promising to desist from grave violations against children. We think this is meant only to cover up the actual violations they commit against children. That can be seen in their forced recruitment and abuse of children in armed conflict. It is a statement without weight that will not positively change the policies and behaviours of the armed movements, nor influence our unwavering commitment to end the recruitment and use of children.

The report of the Secretary-General indicates that we have signed a joint plan of action with the United Nations to protect children in armed conflict. The Special Representative visited the Sudan in March as part of the joint cooperation between the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations to pursue efforts to protect children. The Executive Director of UNICEF commended the signing of the plan of action during the high-level event heald at Headquarters on 11 July on the theme "Rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict: sharing best practices in psychosocial rehabilitation and social reintegration".

That was an illustration of the positive development with regard to the situation of children and armed conflict.

My delegation avails itself of this opportunity to renew its commitment to implement the plan of action, which was reached thanks to the commendable efforts of the Special Representative. We also take this opportunity to thank the individual countries and groups of countries that have expressed their apreciation for the signing of the plan of action. We think that such positive comments serve to place great responsibility on our shoulders. We are aware of that and are ready to assume that responsibility so that we can cooperate with the United Nations and the international community in this area. We reiterate the importance of supporting technical cooperation to achieve the noble joint goal of protecting children from all types of violations.

The report also includes paragraphs concerning violations against children by the Arab coalition in Yemen. We would like again to emphasize the important positive role of those forces in restoring legitimacy in Yemen and protecting civilians, especially children, following the military escalation that undermined security, peace and stability in the country and the region as a whole. We stress the noble objective of the Arab coalition to achieve a political transition in Yemen in accordance with all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Restoring legitimacy quite simply means restoring peace, which in turn means the sustainable and full protection of children in Yemen.

In conclusion, my delegation will continue to cooperate with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her team to protect the rights of children and enable the provision of correct, accurate information and data. My country also reaffirms its commitment to implement all regional and international instruments on protecting the rights of children. We are party to all such instruments. We also reiterate our commitment to the implementation to the plan of action signed with the United Nations to protect children.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momem (Bangladesh): The Bangladesh delegation joins others in thanking your presidency, Madam, for organizing this open debate and for sharing a concise and informative concept note (S/2016/662, annex). We appreciate the compelling statements made by the Secretary-General and the other briefers this morning.

In Bangladesh we often come across the iconic poster for the first-ever humanitarian concert, organized by the late George Harrison and Ravi Shankar here in New York during our liberation war in 1971. The poster showed a sepia-tinged image of a refugee child blankly staring at a starvation-like situation. That sole image spoke volumes about the countless children who perished during the war due to armed attacks, torture, displacement, starvation, disease, disappearance and abandonment. We have yet to reconcile as a nation with many of these unaccounted chapters of our independence struggle.

Children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflicts around the world. The recent, belated news about children faced with a famine-like situation in areas under the sway of Boko Haram in Central Africa demonstrates the limits of our global reach. The sight of children being killed in despicable terrorist attacks in Peshawar or Nice defies our faith in human sanity. The abduction, enslavement and maiming of children, and using them as human shields or suicide bombers by terrorist and armed groups, are just abhorrent, to say the least. The images of hapless children on boats or swimming ashore in the Mediterranean Sea or the Andaman Sea last year brought home to us the horrifying realities of protracted armed conflicts and the systematic purge of communities for how they look or who they pray to.

Yet, as the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360) reveals, there are some grounds for solace. The Children, Not Soldiers campaign is gaining steady momentum, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as we just heard. United Nations-sponsored action plans to remove children from combat operations, often with the support of non-State armed groups, are mostly going in the right direction. Most important, the commitment to disarm children is often paving the way for further inclusive dialogues among parties to conflict. On all those fronts, we appreciate the diligent work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougi, and her team.

The growing number of children displaced due to conflicts poses a real test for our humanitarian principles. In keeping with our pledge to leave no one behind, we must commit to the protection and well-

being of these children as a shared responsibility. The global compacts we envisage for refugee protection and safe, regular and orderly migration must place the cause of children, including unaccompanied minors in mixed migratory movements, at the heart of their respective agendas.

The lurking shadow of violent extremism and terrorism that haunts our children's lives everywhere must not be allowed to be the new normal. The inherent resilience of families and communities needs to be bolstered in order to keep our children safe and engaged. We must harness our resources to raise our children as truly global citizens, with respect for tolerance, pluralism and critical thinking embedded in them. An enlightened and emancipated human being is perhaps our best bet against the forces of destruction.

We draw hope from the growing awareness demonstrated by various State and non-State actors about relieving children of armed training and operations. We owe much of those gains to the work of UNICEF and a number of grass-roots organizations committed to their cause. Civil society actors with proven expertise must be encouraged to work in close partnership with national and local authorities to strengthen and scale up capacity for rehabilitation, reintegration, counselling, legal aid, physiotherapy and psychosocial support for children affected by armed conflict and violent extremism.

We stand in principle behind the call for ending targeted attacks against schools, hospitals and other critical infrastructure for children. The growing sensitization about avoiding school premises for stationing armed forces, including peacekeepers, is indeed positive. As a troop- and police-contributing country to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Bangladesh remains committed to abide by those broadly applicable norms and ensure protection of children within the broader mandates for the protection of civilians. In our regional context, we remain available to advance dialogues on these issues through sharing of ideas and good practices.

We recognize the challenge of evidence-based and credible monitoring, analysis and reporting of child rights violations, especially during armed conflicts. The Secretary-General's annual report, along with its annexes, is indeed a powerful tool for raising global consciousness about grave violations of child rights and for triggering remedial responses. It is therefore crucial that the report aim at putting specific situations in their right perspectives in order to reach informed conclusions about the perpetrators and the seriousness of the alleged violations.

In Bangladesh, our national children policy and corresponding legal measures prohibit the recruitment and use of children for armed conflicts. In memory of the millions of children we lost during our liberation war, we wish to remain engaged with any concrete initiative in future to alleviate the situation of children affected by armed conflict and violent extremism.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mrs. Matar (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Malaysia for organizing this open debate on the issue of children and armed conflict. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing at the beginning of this debate, as well as his Special Representatiave Leila Zerrougi and Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their respective briefings and their commitment to children.

We have seen a horrendous increase in recent years in the number of crimes against children during armed conflict, especiallly in Africa and the Middle East. Those conflicts are the source of long suffering for many families in the war zones. Owing to their greater vulnerability, this constitutes a violation of the rights of the child. While the international community has recognized that children do not belong in war zones, we nevertheless see ongoing systematic violations of children's rights. Children and victims and soldiers. They die in bombings. Extremist armed groups, sush as Da'esh, Al-Qaidia in Iraq, Libya and Syria, the Houthi militias in Yemen — all of them violate the rights of children. Not only have they destabilized regions, these extremist terrorist groups are kidnapping children in order to recruit them into their ranks and to exploit them in suicide bombings, which have become commonplace in all those conflicts.

For its part, the Israeli occupation is violating the rights of children in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Kingdom of Bahrain therefore condemns the violations of human rights by violent extremist groups. While we condemn their acts in general, however, we especially condemn those targeting children.

Today's debate is a crucial step forward in terms of evaluating the progress that has been made to address

serious violations against children's rights. We therefore welcome that the coalition for the re-establishment of legitimacy in Yemen has been removed from the annex to the annual report (S/2016/360) of the Secretary-General. We would draw the Council's attention to the fact the coalition in fact invited a United Nations group to visit Riyadh to observe what is being done in humanitarian and military terms by the coalition.

In conclusion, we reiterate the need to make serious efforts to end these acts against children. We call upon the international community to endeavour to take the necessary steps to end this phenomenon, in particular via cooperation and the provision of technical and logistical support to ensure that those who perpetrate such crimes do not enjoy impunity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Sobral Duarte (Brazil): I thank the Presisdent and the Malaysian presidency for convening this important debate. I am also grateful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougi and UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake for their leadership and their briefings.

In 1996, following the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306), the Security Council created the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, based on the realization that children were the primary victims of armed conflict. Twenty years after the Machel report, the international community's engagement has resulted in a strong framework and concrete tools to engage with parties to conflict and address the violations committed against children, yet armed conflicts continue to have a horrific impact on children, who are denied even the most basic of human rights.

Brazil reiterates its strongest condemnation of the recruitment and use of children, as well as all other violations and abuses, including killing, maiming, rape, other forms of sexual violence, attacks against schools and hospitals, abduction and the denial of humanitarian access. According to the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/360), this year's casualties amount to 1,509 children, the highest number of children killed or wounded in a six-month period since counting began in 2009. That is a cruel reminder of the disproportionate impact of war on children and of the urgent need to protect them.

Thousands of children around the world are associated with armed forces and armed groups. Boys and girls are not only used in combat, but also in support roles or for sexual purposes. Once released from armed forces or armed groups, many suffer from severe psychological disorders. Providing reintegration opportunities is not only a moral and legal obligation, but also an important building block in sustaining peace.

The Secretary-General's report also highlighted the prevalence of armed groups that perpetrate extreme violence. Those groups have committed atrocities against children and tested the response capacity of national authorities and the international community. While recognizing the challenges that States face in addressing the threats posed by such armed groups, responses that do not comply with international law risk inflicting further harm on civilians and helping the very groups that Governments seek to combat. We reiterate our concern with regard to the alarming reports that certain parties that committed violations against girls and boys in the context of war may have been omitted from the annex of the Secretary-General's report.

We commend the efforts and results achieved so far by the Children, Not Soldiers campaign launched by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF. We also commend Chad for having put in place all the measures foreseen in the initiative and encourage other countries facing the problem of the recruitment and the use of children by Government forces to follow suit. The momentum generated by the campaign has also created opportunities for engagement with non-State armed groups. The commitment of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo to ending the recruitment of children in Colombia is a case in point.

Conflicts have also led to an increasing number of refugees and internally displaced persons, almost half of whom are children. Obligations of States of origin, transit and destination must not be disregarded on the grounds of national security. As mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, accountability for violence against children remains too rare, even in countries that have criminalized their recruitment. The protection of children from serious crimes goes hand in hand with tackling impunity and ensuring that the perpetrators are held accountable. In that regard, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

has played a crucial role. Brazil is proud to be one of its signatories.

The right of children to education is not respected in conflict settings where schools are destroyed and teachers killed. The impact of such attacks on education has long-term consequences. The mitralization of education institutions also has devastating effects. Detention on national security grounds is another problem affecting thousands of children in today's conflicts. It is worrisome that children allegedly associated with armed groups are increasingly treated as security threats rather than as victims, particularly in the context of counter-terrorism operations.

Conflict prevention remains the most ethical and effective approach to shielding all civilians, including children, from the plight of war. The Peacebuilding Commission can play a constructive role in promoting policies in countries emerging from conflict to foster social cohesion and render children and youth less vulnerable to recruitment and abuse, including by terrorist groups. Children must not be deprived of their childhood and future. Brazil continues to be fully committed to that endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Aihakim (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation thanks the delegation of Malaysia, in its roles of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, for having convened this debate.

Iraq thanks and commends Japan for its presidency last month. We also thank Ms. Leila Zerrougi and her team for their tireless efforts in carrying out such an important task. We thank and recognize those States that are supporting Iraq. We welcomed the holding of a conference to provide aid to Iraq in Washington, D.C., last week.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/360) notes with great concern the consequences of violent extremism throughout the world, and in particular their effect on children, resulting in the displacement of millions of innocent victims, the majority of whom are children. We share the Secretary-General's profound concern because we are among those States that have suffered the most from foreign extremism and its repercussions on our culture and our age-old civilization. Such is the extremism that created the Da'esh and other terrorist groups that operate under the same premises and share the same goals. Da'esh has committed atrocities against children, whom it uses as a means to achieve its nefarious ends.

In his report, the Secretary-General notes the kidnapping of more than 1,000 Iraqi children and the recruitment of 19 children as soldiers and suicide terrorists. Da'esh has transformed schools into training camps, thereby depriving children of their right to an education. Those schools have become centres for the torture and murder of teachers who have refused to teach the Da'esh curriculum. In the area of public health, children are among the first to suffer from the actions of Da'esh, which has executed dozens of doctors who refused to carry out its orders.

Moreover, the planting of bombs in homes, streets, schools and hospitals has made it very difficult to provide humanitarian and medical assistance to children under siege by Da'esh. The child victims who have been exploited by the extremist terrorist groups, in particular young girls who have been sexually assaulted and subject to physical and psychological violence, deserve our absolute protection. I call on the international community to support Iraq in assuming its responsibility to address terrorism and rehabilitate child victims.

We attach great importance to the United Nations. We support the United Nations and work with it in Geneva, Baghdad and New York. At the same time, we call upon the United Nations to be as specific as possible in its reports. We demand that it verify the sources of information cited in its reports. We categorically reject the accusations that have been made in this report with regard to the national mobilization forces and the national security forces of Iraq.

We believe that the sources of information are not reliable. We do not know what prompts them to provide that information. Some of the sources are not even present in the liberated areas or on the battlefield. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq has noted that it is unable to ensure the accuracy of the numbers contained in the report. We have, on more than one occasion, insisted that imprecise information is a burden on countries that seek to defend their territory against the most merciless terrorist groups.

We therefore reject what is presented in the report, to wit, that 12 children were drafted into the popular mobilization forces, which are associated with Iraq's

general staff. As such they are subject to the same rules as other armed forces, and therefore cannot conscript children under the age of 18.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. Barros Melet (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Malaysia for having convened this debate and for leading the Informal Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We welcome the recommendations of the Secretary-General and appreciate the work of Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Mr. Anthony Lake and their teams in preventing and eradicating the brutal violations to which children are subjected to both during and after conflicts.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and with the statement delivered by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the Human Security Network. Chile is a member of both groups.

We emphatically condemn the six most egregious categories of violations that the Security Council has identified. We States have the primary responsibility of fighting against impunity and of prosecuting and punishing the perpetrators of atrocity crimes committed against children. If we are unable or disinclined to do so, it is incumbent upon the International Criminal Court to prosecute the crimes covered by the Rome Statute. The Court's recent conviction of Jean-Pierre Bemba for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including rape, which recognizes his command responsibility, serves as a precedent in that regard.

We call for reparations for victims, including children, of such atrocities through the Trust Fund that has been established for that purpose. The multidisciplinary rehabilitation and reintegration of boys and girls affected by these grave violations must be at the core of the United Nations system and of mediation and peace efforts. The Colombian peace process provides an good example in that connection.

Similarly, we must bolster national capacities and the capacity of the Organization in order to provide it with the necessary tools to protect and reintegrate affected children, who above all should be recognized as victims, in strict compliance with the law and taking into account the special needs of girls. In that regard, we call for enhanced predeployment training for mission personnel in order to ensure that child-protection advisers have direct access to heads of missions, without confusing their role with that of human rights advisers.

It is crucial that reports on this topic and lists of those responsible for the grave violations under this agenda item be based on verified, timely and impartial information, thereby avoiding double standards in their drafting. Only in that way can we ensure that the respective working group and the system at large respond to the need to protect children.

Chile notes with concern the increasing use of schools and hospitals for military purposes, including the stockpiling of weapons, as well as attacks carried out against such facilities. We call for the effective implementation of resolutions 2143 (2014) and 2286 (2016) — co-sponsored by Chile — in addition to the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, as well as the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration.

Children are not only deprived of their right to education, they are also victims of violent extremism, propaganda and incitement to hatred. We must redouble our efforts to eradicate such phenomena and implement effective protection measures through a broad, not merely military, approach that addresses the root causes and establishes preventive measures by promoting a culture of peace.

The success of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign is not sufficient, it must go hand in hand with the effective implementation of the action plans of committed States, with the support of the elevant partners. To that effect, we insist on the need to continue efforts to ensure that all perpetrators commit to prevent and eradicate such violations.

Finally, Chile expresses its appreciation to United Nations and non-governmental organization personnel, some of whom are here today, for their decisive efforts to eradicate these violations and to safeguard the childhood of the millions affected by conflict through consideration of this Council agenda.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): I would like to start by congratulating Malaysia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August and thank its delegation for convening this debate.

Last year's meeting (see S/PV.7466), during which resolution 2225 (2015) was adopted, which Turkey co-sponsored, took a bold step in strengthening the children and armed conflict agenda. However, as the Secretary-General noted, serious challenges to the protection of children affected by armed conflict persisted throughout 2015. The impact of protracted conflicts on children continued unabated. Turkey has seen this very vividly in its neighbourhood, especially in the eyes of millions of displaced children. With the unfolding, large-scale movement of refugees in the Mediterranean Basin, the number of refugee children also saw a dramatic increase.

Regrettably, the international community has not been able to prevent the deaths and injuries sustained by thousands of children during attacks and air strikes, often conducted indiscriminately on schools, hospitals, marketplaces and internally displaced persons camps. As long as such unacceptable acts and violations of international humanitarian law continue, the forced displacement of children will not cease. Today that is especially true for thousands of children facing a dire situation in Aleppo. Moreover, the increasing involvement of non-State armed groups in violating the basic rights of children is an issue of concern. The crimes committed by terrorist organizations such as Da'esh and Boko Haram must be underlined in that regard. Nevertheless, there are positive aspects to the ongoing efforts of the United Nations to diminish the risks posed by armed conflicts to children. The Children, Not Soldiers campaign led by the Office of the Special Representative continues to generate political momentum around the issue.

A number of important meetings and summits, including the World Humanitarian Summit, have dealt with issues relating to the protection of and assistance for children in conflicts and emergencies.

In the period ahead, a display of joint and robust political determination as well as concerted action will be our most crucial tool for addressing the issue of children and armed conflict. The efforts of the United Nations to provide essential assistance to children, as well as monitoring and reporting functions that facilitate better planning, protection and response, should be supported.

The continued implementation of the Secretary-General's zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeeping operations remains crucial. We should also bear in mind that tackling terrorism and violent extremism requires a comprehensive approach that includes the education of youth.

In the face of the recent waves of displacement in our region, Turkey has pursued an open-door policy for Syrians fleeing the ongoing conflict. Turkey has granted Syrians temporary protection status and enacted numerous measures in order to alleviate the harsh circumstances facing adults and children alike.

Around 156,000 Syrian children have been born in Turkey during the course of the conflict. Free health care, enrolment in Turkish schools and special measures for psychosocial support have been provided to Syrian children. Furthermore, for Syrian students completing their secondary and high-school educations in Turkey, there are also higher-education opportunities through Government-provided scholarships and through acceptance to Turkish universities.

The education of Syrian children will remain at the top of our agenda. There are 830,000 school-age Syrian children, and more than half of them are missing out on schooling. International support for more classrooms and educational opportunities for these children is urgently needed.

We expect Member States to consider these issues at the 19 September high-level meeting on large-scale movements.

I would like to underline Turkey's continuing comprehensive efforts for the rehabilitation of children suffering from the effects of terrorism in our region and beyond. Turkey's unwavering support for all international and regional efforts related to the protection of children will continue.

I have refrained from taking the Council's valuable time to respond to the baseless accusations levelled by the representative of the Syrian regime. Suffice it to say that we stand by the Syrian people and that our humanitarian efforts are taking place in cooperation with our partners and international organizations.

Before I conclude, let me quote the following excerpts on Syria from paragraph 154 of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/360):

> "Air strikes, indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas and objects, and complex attacks were the primary causes of the killing and maiming of children ...

> Aerial attacks and the shelling of civilian areas by Government forces and international forces supporting the Government killed and injured 531 children, including 133 from indiscriminate barrel bombs."

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Albatayneh (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate Malaysia on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August. I should like also to thank the briefers.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/360) on violations against children in armed conflict around the world makes it abundantly clear that those violations continue to be committed in a systematic and wide-scale manner and that there are grave challenges before us to provide the necessary protection to children. Perhaps one of the main reasons for the increasing scope of the phenomenon is the failure to provide the necessary protection to civilians in general and children in particular, as well as the lack of a legal framework to do so. We therefore believe that much of the work that should be done to provide the necessary protection and support to the children affected should take place through the adoption of measures at the national, regional and international levels.

At the national level, we continue to believe that it is the responsibility of the State to protect its civilians, particularly children, through legislative, legal and judicial improvements and the development of the policies necessary to deal with violations against children in armed conflict; to hold accountable the perpetrators of such violations; and to put an end to impunity, since impunity and lack of accountability play a major role in the spread of such criminality and make the perpetrators believe that they can enjoy impunity.

At the regional level, it is important to promote cooperation among States so as to devise joint policies and strategies to address the issue of cross-border armed groups that recruit children, and to do so through the promotion of an security and military information exchange among States, particularly those whose civilians have been the victims of such violations.

At the international level, in the context of the Security Council and other legal entities, it is absolutely necessary not to reach any agreements or hold any reconciliation processes among regional parties or parties within one State at the expense of other important issues, such as holding perpetrators to account for their crimes. The United Nations should supervise such processes to ensure that they do not fail to punish perpetrators for their crimes against civilians and children in particular.

Jordan continues to be concerned with regard to certain violations perpetrated by peacekeepers and members of other international forces not affiliated with the United Nations, particularly violations against children. In that regard, we welcome Security Council resolution 2272 (2016), which stipulates that a military unit or police unit must be repatriated when there is definite proof that it has committed violations. We urge that all those who have been involved in such violations be held responsible for them.

We also support the recommendation of the Secretary-General on the establishment of child-protection units in peacekeeping operations so as to facilitate the provision of such protection and to make it a main aspect of peacekeeping operations.

With regard to the baseless and false accusations made by the representative of the Syrian regime in our meeting today, we would like to stress that this is only an attempt to create a diversion aimed at covering up that regime's failure to shoulder its responsibility to protect its people and put an end to the killing and displacement of children. These accusations fly in the face of reality. Jordan is a country that has definite credibility in supporting the States and peoples of the region. We have since the beginning of the Syrian crisis supported the Syrian people, 1.3 million of whom, including hundreds of thousands of children, have fled to Jordan in search of a safe haven following the killing and destruction committed by the Syrian regime.

In this regard, Jordan continues to do its utmost to provide Syrian children and refugees with a chance at a better future and give them the highest levels of protection and care, as demonstrated at the London donors conference, at which the Jordanian Government presented the international community with an eight-point document laying out its policy to provide educational opportunities to all refugee children so as to provide them with a better future. We continue to coordinate with United Nations specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations in establishing specialized care centres to provide the necessary

educational, health and protective environment to help children receive the services they need and the psychological and social support to which they are entitled.

In conclusion, with regard to the measures taken by the coalition to restore legitimacy to Yemen and the responses to all the queries raised with regard to possible violations in Yemen, we would to see a working group established to look into and verify the facts on this issue. As stated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360), the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict continues to consider the various cases before it and the coalition has invited the Working Group several times to visit the region and to review the facts that have been gleaned so far. In this regard, the work is continuing and Jordan supports all efforts to protect children in armed conflict. We thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Hau Do Suan (Myanmar): My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the Malaysian presidency of the Security Council for organizing this important meeting. Our appreciation also goes to Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their dedication and tireless efforts to protect children affected by armed conflict.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Thailand on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

I thank the Secretary-General for reflecting in his report (S/2016/360) the many positive steps taken by Myanmar in relation to recruiting child soldiers. Myanmar's efforts to stop the recruitment of children intensified after it signed the joint action plan with the United Nations in 2012. Since then, a total of 744 former child soldiers have been released and reintegrated into their families and communities. Actions have been taken against 382 military personnel, including 73 officers, for violating recruitment rules. Among the 744 children who have been released, 553 have benefited from various support programmes provided by the Government, such as education, vocational training, jobs and family subsidies. The remaining are mostly those who could not be contacted owing to various reasons.

In collaboration with the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting, UNICEF, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other NGOs, Myanmar has launched a nationwide Children, Not Soldiers campaign to raise awareness against child recruitment. Hotlines have been set up to receive complaints or enquiries concerning child recruitment and the reintegration of the former child soldiers. Legal briefings and awareness-raising on the prevention of the recruitment of underage children and the four Geneva Conventions have also been continued. At the same time, a monthly meeting with the country task force on monitoring and reporting have been regularly held to verify suspected child recruits. Increased access to military battalions and units has been granted for monitoring.

In recent months, the Government has also taken additional measures to identify the remaining gaps in full compliance and delisting. In May, a 12-member Committee for the Prevention of Recruitment of Minors in Military Service was formed by presidential decree. The Committee has been tasked with implementing measures, including strict enforcement of recruitment procedures, and with enhancing cooperation with United Nations agencies. Subsequently, a new joint action plan has also been signed between the Committee and the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting. Our strong commitment to working with the United Nations to solve this problem was manifested yet again during the successful visit of the Special Representative in July last year.

As the Secretary-General has rightly pointed out in his report, sustainable peace is the only way to reduce conflict-related displacement and to alleviate the plight of children in armed conflicts. Peace is a prerequisite to sustainable development and the perpetuity of democracy and human rights. Bearing this in mind, the Government of Myanmar has made peace and national reconciliation its highest priorities on the national agenda. We are now preparing in earnest a union peace conference scheduled to convene by the end of this month where all armed groups are invited to participate. The peace conference will be attended by the Government, the political parties, ethnic nationalities and representatives from civil societies. The conference will deliberate and strive for achieving a comprehensive, all-inclusive and lasting peace, and

building a democratic federal union. We are confident that we shall soon witness the dawn of a new era in Myanmar where there is no more armed conflict and peace prevails across the country. All children will enjoy their full rights of freedom, education and opportunities for the better future they deserve. They shall no longer be the victims of armed conflicts when the guns fall silent.

As a result of the unfailing commitment and relentless efforts of the Government of Myanmar, significant progress has been made in the prevention of child recruitment, the release of child soldiers and their reintegration into the communities. Despite all these positive developments, Myanmar Tatmadaw, the Myanmar Army, has yet to be delisted from the United Nations report. Therefore, we hope that the Myanmar Tatmadaw will soon be delisted from the report in recognition of the Government's continuous cooperation with the United Nations and the progress made in this regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Nguyen (Viet Nam): I wish to thank Malaysia for convening this open debate and for its leadership as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/360) and briefing. I am also grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Anthony Lake, for their insights.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Thailand on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Children and armed conflict has been firmly high on the agenda of the United Nations and the Security Council in particular. Tangible progress has been made, especially the strong momentum generated by the Children, Not Soldiers campaign. Thousands of children have been released from armed groups. States concerned are implementing their respective Council-mandated action plans. Child protection policies have been incorporated in peacekeeping operations. Civil and social organizations are energetically contributing to these endeavours.

Yet, these efforts are still falling far short of our hopes and aspirations. Children continue to be deprived of their basic rights and needs in both armed conflict and post-conflict situations. The longer-term impacts on children's development are equally of serious concern. Viet Nam condemns the continued killing of and violence against children, including sexual violence, as well as the recruitment and use of child soldiers, the acts of abduction and attacks targeting schools and hospitals. We call on all parties to conflicts to put an end to these outrageous acts, first and foremost, by complying with international human rights and humanitarian law.

We wish to underline the importance of a preventive strategy that addresses the root causes of armed conflict by promoting sustainable development, poverty eradication, national reconciliation, the rule of law at both national and international levels, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the reintegration and rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict.

There are also challenges in responding to the needs of children not only during, but also after conflicts. My delegation is of the view that, in post-conflict situations, priority should be given to children and United Nations agencies should devote more resources to programmes targeting children in the areas of education, mental and physical health, as well as addressing the long-term impacts on children, particularly girls and children with disabilities.

As a country where generations of children have suffered immensely from devastating wars, and suffer even today, Viet Nam is strongly committed to defending and promoting the best interests of children, especially those affected by conflicts.

Viet Nam is making every possible effort to care for and protect children with disabilities caused by explosive remnants of war and agent orange/dioxin. Viet Nam was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has ratified its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. During its term in the Council in 2008-2009, Viet Nam convened an open debate on children and armed conflict (see S/PV.5936) and worked with other Council members to adopt resolution 1882 (2009).

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Viet Nam will continue to work with the Council and the international community for the protection and the betterment of children affected by armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Hadaifi (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on Malaysia's assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month. We thank you for convening this meeting to discuss a theme of great importance to the most vulnerable segment of society, namely, children. Qatar commends your delegation's efforts in chairing the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

The Security Council's ongoing consideration of this topic reflects the importance which the international community attaches to the protection of children, based on its understanding that building safe and stable societies and achieving peace and security in the world starts with the protection of children and providing them with a safe and sound environment. Despite the commitments undertaken in the framework of international humanitarian law governing parties to conflict that are intended to protect civilians in armed conflict, and despite the fact that international humanitarian law insists that warfare must be bound by respect for the lives of civilians, given the devastating impact of armed conflict on individuals and societies — particularly children, who pay the heaviest price as its most vulnerable, helpless and most affected victims — we have all seen the grave impact of war on the cognitive, physical and psychological development of the children in armed conflict, as well as its consequent effects on society.

International human rights law and instruments and the Council's resolutions all provide for the protection of children, particularly protections in accordance with the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its additional protocols. Article 77 of Protocol I of 1977 stipulates that

> "[c]hildren shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The Parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason".

Similarly, article 38 of the 1989 (2011) Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by all countries, stipulates the protection of children in armed conflict.

Qatar believes in the importance of education and its positive impact on children's development a sound basis, free from violence and extremism. It is our conviction that the right to education and concurrent responsibilities are not rescinded due to armed conflict. Children's rights must therefore be protected. The State of Qatar attaches great importance to guaranteeing children's education in times of crisis. This concern was reflected in the establishment of the Education Above All Foundation, which seeks to offer education opportunities to societies suffering from conflict and poverty. The Foundation has developed such programmes as the Educate a Child initiative, which has been implemented in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. We provide education to children and empower them in situations of armed conflict.

My country also supports the Safe Schools Declaration which was adopted at the Oslo conference last year under the them "Protect education from attack". We continue to focus on that issue and organized, in cooperation with the Qatari Education Above All Foundation and a number of permanent missions, a high-level event on the margins of the seventieth session of the General Assembly to empower children and promote their inclusion in development efforts. It aims to provide them with skills and knowledge, protect them from exploitation and protect their right to a decent standard of living.

Children must live in a safe environment, free from fear and displacement. We are therefore taking ongoing measures to implement a joint plan of action to that end.

Another important issue that we wish to highlight is the responsibility of parties to a conflict to ensure the delivery of assistance to children, which is a critical obligation. The Fourth Geneva Convention requires that civilians, even when associated with the enemy, enjoy free access to medical supplies and other items, including food, vaccines and medication. In that regard, the State of Qatar is concerned about violations that continue to affect child victims in the occupied Palestinian territories and in Syria. Children will continue to be be harmed and suffer until the international community can achieve a settlement to those conflicts. In that context, the Council must prioritize the protection of children as it addresses those matters.

Tolerant Islamic shariah law played a pioneering role in developing rules on protecting children from the scourge of armed conflict. Any professional involved in international humanitarian law knows that the provisions of Islamic shariah law are in line with international humanitarian law and international instruments on the protection of children in conflict, as confirmed in a number of studies and literature issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The international coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen has therefore taken great pains to protect civilians there and to offer them humanitarian assistance, and to treat children with special care in accordance with international humanitarian law and religious law.

Qatar is determined to maintain its principled position and commitments in order to maintain its cooperation with the international community to ensure an enabling environment for the protection of children, not only during armed conflict but at all times and in all circumstances, so that they can grow up in a healthy and sound environment that nurtures their potential and turns them into peacemakers, thereby generating hope in their societies and for humankind as a whole.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Ms. Mammadova (Azerbaijan): I would like to congratulate Malaysia on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of August, and commend it for convening this important open debate on children and armed conflict. Our thanks and appreciation also go to all briefers for their valuable contributions.

Azerbaijan commends the Security Council for keeping this topic high on its agenda and for the work undertaken by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2016/360) once again presents a devastating account of children suffering from armed conflict. We especially note with concern the increasing trend in child abductions. In this regard, we reconfirm our support to resolution 2225 (2015), which designates abduction as a new criterion for listing of parties in the Secretary-General's annual report.

The impact of violent extremism on children — in particular the use of the Internet and social media to brainwash and recruit children as combatants, suicide bombers and executioners — has reached alarming dimensions. We concur with the assessment in the report that purely military and security approaches are not sufficient. To effectively address the challenge, we should focus on the triggers of violent extremism and provide greater support to education as a powerful tool to counter extremist ideologies.

The issue of children displaced by armed conflict is another matter of utmost concern to Azerbaijan, and we fully share the Secretary-General's recommendation, offered in paragraph 222, that the Security Council highlight, in its resolutions and debates, the prevention of displacement and the rights of children displaced by conflict.

It is obvious that more sustained efforts and renewed commitments are urgently required to combat impunity in a more resolute manner. National authorities should investigate and prosecute all violations and abuses committed against children in situations of armed conflict by bringing those responsible to justice and thereby fully ensuring accountability, which will serve as a strong warning to all perpetrators around the world that their horrendous crimes will never be tolerated or go unpunished. The international community should also play a more proactive role in ensuring accountability and the rule of law. In this context, we encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to continue to share information with the appropriate sanctions committees.

The war waged against Azerbaijan by neighbouring Armenia has claimed the lives of tens of thousands civilians, including children. In its relevant resolutions, the Security Council has condemned the violations of international humanitarian law committed during the conflict, including attacks on civilians and the bombardment of inhabited areas. However, the perpetrators of those violations, including members of the political and military leadership of Armenia, continue to enjoy impunity, and this situation represents a serious challenge to ensuring sustainable peace, justice, truth and reconciliation.

Recently, in April, Armenia conducted large-scale attacks, including against the civilian population of Azerbaijan, as a result of which children were killed and a number of schools, kindergartens and medical facilities substantially damaged. In this regard, we subscribe to the recommendation of the Secretary-General that that all parties to the conflict should refrain

from using explosive weapons in populated areas. Indeed, the suffering of children could be significantly alleviated if the parties were to respect international humanitarian and human rights law.

The vast majority of atrocities against children are attributed to non-State armed groups. The international community should do its utmost to support the countries concerned in their struggle to eradicate such armed groups. The Secretary-General's report refers to the need of United Nations engagement with non-State armed groups in order to effectively protect children. While we recognize the humanitarian aspect of this matter, it is our firm belief that any engagement with the non-State actors should be undertaken exclusively with the consent of the legitimate Government on whose territory such groups operate. Otherwise, we run the risk of sending the wrong message that violence pays and of granting privileges to groups that undermine the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political unity of United Nations Member States. On its part, the Council should not only condemn acts by terrorist or extremist forces; it should also adopt and apply a zero-tolerance policy against them so as to create a safe environment for children.

On a positive note, we are pleased to see that some progress was made in alleviating the suffering of children in situations of armed conflict during the reporting period. Various action plans to end the recruitment and use of children have been signed and thousands of children have been released from armed forces and armed groups. We welcome the progress made by the Children, Not Soldiers campaign. Azerbaijan supports the mandate of the Special Representative and encourages her to pay attention to the suffering of children in all situations of armed conflict

Let me conclude by highlighting the urgent need of conflict resolution all over the world, which constitutes the most efficient way to put an end to the plight and suffering of children. We call upon all Member States and the international community to accelerate their conflict-resolution efforts to that end.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to make a further statement.

Mr. Qassem Agha (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for prolonging this meeting. I know that everyone wants to rest, but I should like to respond to the remarks made by the representatives of the regimes of Jordan and Turkey.

With regard to the references made to grave violations against Syrian children in the northern and southern parts of my country, and to the mobilization of Qatari, Jordanian and Saudi intelligence forces along Jordan's borders with Syria, these issues will be revealed to be true in due course. Whenever we address a particular issue, we first document it by gathering evidence in our strategic analysis centres. If the Jordanian regime is innocent of these accusations, as the Jordanian Ambassador claims, time will prove it so.

The information concerning children and the deplorable humanitarian situation in Jordan's refugee camps, particularly the story concerning the deaths of two children there, was reported by the media agencies of Jordan itself. That is also true of the refugee camps of Turkey, which are rife with maiming, killing and displacement.

The meeting rose at 6.50 p.m.